Dr. Jacob V. Kahn, Camp Greenleaf, Georgia, 1918.
(Courtesy of Dorothy Kay Schwartz)

*Linked by Letters: A Doctor with the American Expeditionary Forces and His Chicago Family, a Jewish World War I Story**

Ava F. Kahn

On the Fourth of July, 1957, a Chicago family on a road trip west picnicked on sandwiches, "watermelon (that was a must), strawberries and apple pie"[1] in a Nebraska park and then settled in to watch fireworks from their blanket on the grass. The older man, who was taking his niece and her eighteen-year-old daughter on a trip across the country, was so

* This article is dedicated to Dorothy Kay Schwartz, Dr. Kahn's grandniece. She advised me and shared with me photographs and letters addressed to her mother and grandmother. Dr. Kahn's letters are quoted as written; they were not edited for spelling, grammar, or punctuation. The writing of this article was much improved by the assistance of several people and archives: Jonathan D. Sarna; Kevin Proffitt at The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (hereafter AJA) and the Rabbi Joachim Prinz Memorial Fellowship; Paul W. Grasmehr, reference coordinator, Pritzker Military Museum & Library; Leonid Kondratiuk, director, Historical Services, Adjutant General's Office, Massachusetts; Sanders Marble, Ph.D., senior historian, History Branch, Army Medical Department Center of History and Heritage, U.S. Army Medical Command; Eddy Oziol, historian, Academy of Clermont-Ferrand (France); Eric Panthou, librarian, Clermont Auvergne University (France); John F. Sweet, historian, University of Kansas; the staff at the American Jewish Historical Society (hereafter AJHS); Mitchell Richman; Ruth P. Haber, reader par excellence; and the insights of AJA's anonymous readers.

1 Dr. Kahn's grandniece remembers, "We then went to a small park— put a blanket down on the grass & had a wonderful picnic. After dark we watched fireworks. I will never forget that 4th. It had so much meaning for Uncle Jay. He loved his country—was so patriotic his entire Life…. Uncle Jay wanted to show me our beautiful Country which he loved so well. I shall NEVER forget what he did for me that summer. Nothing could have been better." Email from Dorothy Kay Schwartz, 28 February 2018.

patriotic that he had to stop for the traditional picnic and fireworks, even in the middle of their travels. It would be unthinkable for him not to take every opportunity he could to express his patriotism.

The man's name was Dr. Jacob V. Kahn, and the purpose of the road trip was to introduce his grandniece, Dorothy Kay Newberg, to the country he loved so much. "He talked of the love he had for the country," and he wanted to share it all—from Rocky Mountain National Park, to Colorado Springs (to see the newly constructed Air Force Academy), to Denver, to the Great Salt Lake, and on to the Golden Gate.[2] Although it had been almost forty years since he had served in World War I, some thought the "V" in his name stood for victory, so strong was his pride in the American victories and his love of country.[3] Patriotism, medicine, and family formed the central pillars of his life.

Kahn had served the Chicago community and its Michael Reese and South Chicago hospitals for many years. He was what we would now call an old-fashioned doctor—making house calls with a black bag, delivering babies, and tending to patients of all ages. When he retired in the 1940s, he joined 168,000 Jews in making Los Angeles his new home.[4]

To the outsider Kahn looked no different from other recent retirees who had settled in southern California. However, that is only part of his story and the story of many men of his generation. Kahn was a

2 Ibid.

3 Dorothy Kay Schwartz (née Newberg), in conversation with author.

4 This figure, an all-time high for the number of Jewish migrants in a year, would not be reached again. By 1950, these numbers produced a significant change in the percentage of Jews living in the city. At the beginning of the 1940s they numbered only 4 percent, but by the end of the decade the number reached to 7 percent. Indeed, the Jewish community grew faster than the general population that was also increasing by leaps and bounds. Bruce Phillips amplified the point: "At that time the majority (62 percent) of Jewish households reported being in the city five years or less; a mere 16 percent of Jewish households in Los Angeles in 1951 had lived in that city before World War II. In effect, a whole new community came into being in the space of a decade." Bruce Phillips, "Los Angeles Jewry: A Demographic Portrait," *The American Jewish Year Book* 86 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1986), 128, 141. By 1953, as many Jews lived in Los Angeles as lived in Kahn's former home city of Chicago. Jacob Rader Marcus, *To Count a People: American Jewish Population Data, 1585–1984* (New York: Lanham, 1990), 24, 57.

lieutenant with the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) in World War I. The role of native-born American Jewish soldiers in World War I has been largely overshadowed by American Jewish soldiers' significant participation in World War II.[5] And to the extent that the story of Jews in the AEF has gained attention, it is typically the story of heroism in battle and/or the challenges for new immigrants in military service.[6] By contrast, Kahn was a U.S.-born medical professional, and his contributions make his story different and worthy of exploration.

The men who fought and survived World War I found that those years often shaped their world outlook, cemented their bond with home and country, and transformed their relationships with friends and family.[7] For Kahn, these transformations became most evident in his intense patriotism, which he sought to pass down to future generations; and in his postwar curiosity to further explore the world. More subtle changes among these former soldiers are harder to define; however, they left clues in letters sent home. This article examines the letters Dr. Jacob Kahn sent to his family during his time in the AEF.[8] His letters tell more about

5 Deborah Dash Moore, *GI Jews: How World War II Changed a Generation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

6 Kahn's first-generation status distinguishes his experiences from those of the Jewish immigrants who served. For example, see Christopher M. Sterba, *Good Americans: Italian and Jewish Immigrants During the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Gene Fax, *With Their Bare Hands: General Pershing, The 79th Division, and the Battle for Montfauçon* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2017); Nancy Gentile Ford, *Americans All! Foreign-Born Soldiers in World War I* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001); Richard S. Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders: The American Soldier in World War I* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2017); David Laskin, *The Long Way Home: An American Journey from Ellis Island to the Great War* (New York: Harper, 2010) and Richard Slotkin, *Lost Battalions: The Great War and the Crisis of American Nationality* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005). These books discuss the experiences of American Jews in the military during the war; however, they do not reference Jews in the AEF's Medical Corps.

7 The transformation of Jewish immigrants' outlooks, loyalty, and confidence during the war years is documented in Sterba, *Good Americans*, especially the final chapters.

8 The collection consists of twenty-five handwritten letters and postcards received by Kahn's sister, Ray Greenwald; sister-in-law Bessie Kahn; and niece Leah Greenwald from May 1918 to April 1919. The collection is held by family members. Plans are under way

his priorities and transformation than about the war itself. When read chronologically, they show progression from writing about the solely personal to also writing about relationships with the men with whom he served.

The Distinctive Nature of War Letters

In the days before instant communication by mobile phones and the Internet, letters from men in the training camps and on the battlefields provided the glue necessary to maintain family connections, transmit news of daily occurrences, and educate family members about life in the military. Beyond chronicling wartime experiences, the letters expressed concern for the welfare of family members, longing for home and Jewish holiday celebrations, and the new soldier's increasing patriotism. By examining these letters and placing them in context, the twenty-first-century reader can reach a fuller understanding of the men, the events they experienced, and the dynamics of Jewish family life.

Most letters from soldiers contained a degree of truth. Due to military censorship, some locations and events could only be described at the war's end. A soldier wrote from France, "I dare say that you or your mother have not received all of my mail. A great deal of it gets lost in the chief censor's office."[9] Therefore, some men, at times unsuccessfully, employed subterfuge to bypass military censors. But the correspondence faced another censor as well; the men themselves shaped their narrative to fit their correspondents. Often, soldiers tried to protect and reassure their families of their safety. Letters reflected what the author wanted his audience to believe, not always the reality of the situation. A parent, sister, or friend may have wished to learn details about the soldiering life; however, the storyteller often fashioned the narrative to fit the intended reader's knowledge, interest, and most importantly for some, perceived fears. Another factor to consider is gender. Men often wrote to women—their mothers, sisters, and children. Many letters became family and even public documents, shared by parents, siblings

to make the collection available to researchers. Unless otherwise noted, the letters cited are in possession of the author.

9 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Leah Greenwald, 19 November 1918.

and newspapers alike. Did the soldiers write differently if the letters were intended for men only? This may be something for further study. Historians Deborah Dash Moore and Jessica Cooperman, both of whom have studied American war letters, agree that the letters are unreliable sources.[10]

As a case study, however, letters can be illuminating. A century after they were written, these letters deserve to be studied and evaluated. World War I letters enlighten readers by chronicling individual experiences. At the same time, they push the reader to question what may be distorted or left unsaid. These distortions also give us insight and, together with confirmed descriptions, open another window into American Jewish family life in the early twentieth century. When the letters from the training camps and war zones began to arrive, how much did their recipients know about military life? What type of questions did they ask? In addition to big-city newspapers, some Jewish families learned about "their boys" in the columns of national Jewish newspapers. These articles often provided a context for letters received by family members. With a national circulation, the Cincinnati-based *American Israelite* served as a conduit between its readership and Jews in uniform, national organizations, and local war-related activities. Beyond its feature articles, the paper, like many newspapers of the day, corresponded with its readers throughout the United States and abroad. In a role similar to that of today's social media, columns became an early-twentieth-century version of a curated Jewish Facebook.

With a correspondent system already in place, *The American Israelite* reported soldiers' comings and goings as well as the wartime activities of Jewish communities large and small through its new column, "The War: Activities of Jewish Organizations, Societies, Congregations and Clubs Relating to the War." It also printed calls for letters from its readers. For example, in November 1917, the paper asked for "news of our soldier boys, where they are stationed, their home town and family

10 Email from Deborah Dash Moore to author, 3 October 2017. Jessica Cooperman, email to author, 4 October 2017. However, some historians successfully use soldiers' letters to illustrate their arguments. For example, see Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders*.

connections."[11] Soldiers' families and communities sent in personal correspondence they received from "the boys" that told stories of military life and shared private concerns. One serviceman, after describing a typical day of rising early for a day of physical training, which he stated he enjoyed, wrote, "Just as long as you and dad stay as well as I, we haven't a thing to complain of."[12] This emphasizes a common theme in many war letters: a desire for confirmation of mutual well-being.

Local Jewish newspapers in major cities such as San Francisco and Chicago also published letters from the men in the military. Chicago's *Sentinel* announced that it "welcomed pictures and items of the sons and daughters of its subscribers who are in government service. Be it good or bad news *The Sentinel* will lend whatever cheer it can."[13] In November 1917 the *Sentinel* ran the headline, "With the Jewish Boys at Rockford and Other Army Camps," under which it published a letter from Sam Schwartz, who wrote, "I am now in France with the First American Expeditionary Force. As young as I am, I am going to do my bit for my country."[14] Schwartz reiterates another common theme: growing patriotism.

The thirst for letters to and from those in service was heightened during the war, but it followed a general emphasis on letter writing during that era. This was a generation of letter writers. In Chicago until 1950 residents received two mail deliveries a day. Before phone conversations replaced letters, people in different Chicago neighborhoods could expect answers to their morning letters by the afternoon mail. Daily letters were the email of the time. Family members at home shared letter-writing duties.

Throughout his time in the military, Kahn kept up a steady correspondence. Part of an extended family web, not all of his correspondents

11 *The American Israelite* (22 November 1917): 5.

12 Letter from Irwin E. Basler to his parents from Camp Sherman, 11 September 1917. Published as "Letter from a Young Soldier," *The American Israelite* (20 September 1917): 8.

13 "With Our Boys Overseas and in the Camps," *The Sentinel* (18 October 1918).

14 "Boy From Deborah Boys Club with Pershing's Force in France: 'Sam' Schwartz Writes from the Trenches," *The Sentinel* (16 November 1917): 10.

were directly related to each other or to the men overseas. But all who could be recruited wrote. Kahn's extended family corresponded with as many as five soldiers during the war. His known correspondents included his parents (these letters are lost but are referred to in other letters); his sister, Ray; Ray's teenage daughter, Leah; his sister-in-law, Bessie Kahn; and other extended family members (some also in the military).

Revealingly, Kahn wrote as many as three different versions of his experiences, often on the same day, tailored to his different correspondents. He wrote so many versions of the same events that, as he confessed to his sister-in-law, "I had one awful time trying to keep my stories straight at home, for I would forget the contents of one letter before I wrote another, and in but few of them did I tell the truth, and to tell the falsehoods I told and get away with it is remarkable."[15] Why the different versions? In the letters sent to his parents, he remained perpetually well and never in harm's way. He did not want them to worry. To his young niece, he wrote of the many interesting things he saw and always thanked her for her thoughtful gifts, especially gum. To his sister-in-law and sister, he wrote the closest to the truth, confiding in his sister-in-law at the end of the war that he was "surprised" his falsehoods had not been exposed.[16]

Kahn's family members also edited their letters to their loved ones in service. Relatives left out information to protect soldiers from bad news at home. Kahn worried that family members distorted details of his father's health. As a doctor, he tried to take care of his family and patients at home emotionally and physically while he served thousands of miles away. In one letter he answered a question from his sister who had requested advice for her sister-in-law, whose baby was having trouble nursing. Now a military doctor, with mostly young men to treat, he wrote a detailed two-page description of how to supplement the baby's breastfeeding.[17] Even when far away, Kahn's family and patients remained paramount.

15 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Bessie Kahn, 12 November 1918.

16 Ibid.

17 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, undated.

Jews: Native-born, German, and Russian

As the American military prepared for war, some labeled Jews as radicals and draft dodgers.[18] In response, many Jewish leaders called for enthusiastic participation in the war effort; objectors obtained little reinforcement.[19] "Help America to Victory! Help the Jewish People to Victory!" editorialized the *Sunday Jewish Courier* in Chicago.[20] Rabbis and community leaders alike encouraged men to do their patriotic duty. Chicago's *Sentinel* reprinted the appeal of the rabbinate of New York's historic Shearith Israel, for "young men to give their services and their lives for the honor of their country."[21] Jews made up 4 to 5 percent of the forces, 200,000 to 250,000 men.[22] Of those, thirty-five hundred died. [23] The percentage of Jewish men who fought in World War I surpassed that of their numbers in the general population, where they comprised just 3.3 percent.[24] About eleven thousand men

18 Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 31.
19 Ibid., 31, 59.
20 As quoted in Ford, *Americans All!,* 38. The article read in part, "The moment has also arrived for us Jews in America to prove that we love America, that we are thankful to America, and that we love our own people, and wish to make them free and happy."
21 "Passover Sermons Urge Patriotism: Oldest Congregation in America Advocates Enlistment," *The Sentinel* (13 April 1917).
22 Julian Leavitt, "American Jews in the World War," *The American Jewish Year Book* 21 (1919): 141–155. The exact number of Jews who served is difficult to verify. Not all Jews self-identified. In addition, the military did not always record religious preference. The Jewish Welfare Board sought to identify Jewish soldiers, but its records are incomplete. Ford, *Americans All!*, 37, puts the number at "over 250,000," while Laskin writes that "Jews made up 5.73 percent of the Army," a higher percentage than others have reported. Laskin, *Long Way Home*, 332. Christopher Capozzola argues that the exact percentage of Jews who served is not important because ethnic groups claimed overrepresentation in all aspects of war volunteerism; however, he believes the act of asserting overrepresentation suggests "the rhetorical power of voluntarism and the need," in his words, to "go over the top." Capozzola, *Uncle Sam*, 32.
23 Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 212.
24 Ibid.

from Kahn's home city of Chicago served.[25] For Jews, volunteering for the fight became a way to prove—and improve—their place in the American mosaic. "Ethnic communities saw Army service as a good way to Americanize and to raise their people's status among 'native' Americans."[26] Immigrants comprised 18 percent of the AEF; many more had immigrant parents.[27]

However, the United States' entry into the war provoked complicated and divergent feelings for some Jews. Many, having left Europe's wars behind them, preached pacifism. California-born Rabbi Judah L. Magnes strongly supported this camp.[28] Some saw the war as a vehicle for achieving rights for European Jews and establishing a national homeland in Palestine.[29] Felix Frankfurter, an assistant to the secretary of war, believed with others that Zionism "is one of the issues of the war and one of the war's necessary conclusions."[30]

The war also challenged the transnational identity of recent immigrants and their children. All could wholeheartedly support the Jewish relief efforts, but not all could agree on who the enemy was. Immigrants from Germany and their descendants faced personal conflicts. Many had strong cultural and intellectual ties with Germany, though not necessarily with the German government.[31] In this war, as in the American Civil

25 This number of men from Chicago varies considerably depending on the source. Cited is the figure reported by Maurice J. Nathanson, "Fighting Men," *The Sentinel: 100 Years of Chicago's Jewish Life* (August 1948), courtesy of Gail Goldberg, librarian, Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership. Twenty thousand is the figure cited by Hyman Louis Meites, *History of the Jews of Chicago* (Chicago: Chicago Jewish Historical Society, 1924), 258; and 5,967 by Leavitt, "American Jews," 144.

26 Fax, *Bare Hands*, 43. Similar ideas are expressed by Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders*, 238.

27 Ibid., 64.

28 Sarna, *American Judaism*, 212.

29 For more on Jews and the war effort see Ford, *Americans All!*, 37–42.

30 Fax, *Bare Hands*, 50.

31 Many Americans admired Germany's cultural and educational emphasis. For a discussion of Jews, members of other ethnic groups, and support of World War I see Fax, *Bare Hands*, 36, and Laskin, *Long Way Home*, 94. Laskin writes, "To Jews, Russia was the land of the pogrom; Germany, by comparison, seemed enlightened." Also see Tobias Brinkmann, "'German Jews?' Reassessing the History of Nineteenth-Century

War, Jewish soldiers fought on both sides.[32] Julius Kahn, the German-born Jewish congressman from San Francisco, removed the "German" from his German-American identity.[33] The removal of the "hyphen" became a symbol of loyalty for ethnic groups, a way to demonstrate 100 percent Americanism and further their assimilation process.[34] In an interview with *The American Israelite*, Congressman Kahn stated that he was an "Out-and-Out American, With No Hyphen." Explaining that "America is the same to all of us, Jew or Gentile, native or foreign born. It means the right to live as free men," he concluded that it was important for Jews to be patriotic and join the fight.[35]

Russian Jews and their descendants faced other complications. Many Jewish families who had escaped persecution in Russia supported Germany's offensive against the army of the czar. Jewish parents could not fathom sending their children to fight alongside the tyrant's army. However, these fears would be reevaluated in 1917 with the onset of the Russian Revolution. Now, with the passage of the Balfour Declaration supporting a Jewish homeland and the czar overthrown, most Jews firmly supported the war effort.[36]

Jewish Immigrants in the United States," in *Transnational Traditions: New Perspectives on American Jewish History*, ed. Ava F. Kahn and Adam D. Mendelsohn (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014), 144–164.

32 Laskin, *Long Way Home*, 92.

33 Julius Kahn is not related to Jacob Kahn or the author of this article.

34 Alien sedition fears produced a call for "100% Americanism," and sought conformity with "dominant Anglo-Saxon culture." Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders*, 234.

35 "Congressman Julius Kahn," *The American Israelite* (23 August 1917). On 4 April 1917 the United States entered the war; just a week later, *The American Israelite* in Cincinnati published an article by Hungarian-born Rabbi David Lefkowitz, who had been ordained by Hebrew Union College in 1900 and served a congregation in Dayton, Ohio. His article stressed that "Every American,… even every German-American, must stand shoulder to shoulder guarding the flag of our beloved country." David Lefkowitz, "The Duty of the Home," *The American Israelite* (12 April 1917): 7. These pronouncements countered the argument that German Jews, especially bankers, were part of German conspiracy movements. Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You*, 181.

36 The *Forverts* reported, "As if by magic, the debates and discussions on the Jewish streets have disappeared." As quoted in Laskin, *Long Way Home*, 119. Also see Slotkin, *Lost Battalions*, 88.

Family History

Fleeing czarist Russia, Jacob Kahn's father, Moses Aaron Kahn, reached Cincinnati in 1881.[37] According to family history, he left behind his pregnant wife, Libbie, and a young son. Libbie died in childbirth, and her sister, Anna Wolf, brought the two children to Cincinnati in 1886 where she married Moses Kahn, her sister's widower.[38] Five years later, the family resettled in South Chicago; Kahn opened a business in that largely immigrant and first-generation neighborhood. There, the Kahns lived for decades in a tight family circle surrounded by extended family, cousins, and in-laws. In 1898, Moses Kahn helped establish the Congregation Bikur Cholim, serving for many years as its president.[39] In the congregation and at home, Moses Kahn modeled for his children traditional Jewish life.[40] Like most American Jewish immigrants, the family strongly believed that the United States would become their generational home.[41] In addition to the two children brought from Europe, Anna and Moses together added five children to the family.[42] Of Moses's daughters, Ray married; Dorothy died at age twenty-six. Of the five sons, three became lawyers, one a salesman, and the youngest, Jacob, a doctor.

Even when Jacob Kahn attended Northwestern Medical School, an hour's ride from home, he continued to live in his parent's home in Chicago's 8th Ward. In fact, it is likely that he had never been away from his parents before military service. At Northwestern, the soon-to-be

37 Moses Kahn joined the approximately 2 million Jews who fled Russia's Pale of Settlement between 1881 and 1914 after a wave of pogroms. Kahn, like other men, left his family in Russia and sent for them when he could afford to do so. This chain migration is described by Laskin in *Long Way Home*, 2.

38 The author wishes to thank Dorothy Schwartz for this information.

39 For images and brief history see: "To Rescue Falling Stars," *Chicago Sun-Times* (28 September 1997): 13. His son, Louis Kahn, a lawyer, became the founding president of the Reform South Shore Temple in 1922. Meites, *Jews of Chicago*, 543.

40 Referred to in letters later quoted and emails to the author from family members.

41 Evidenced by the establishment of roots in the community and founding of permanent institutions; also note: "Immigrant parents hoped their children would succeed as Americans, and at the same time feared the consequences." Slotkin, *Lost Battalions*, 86.

42 Jacob was born 6 June 1890.

doctor became sergeant-at-arms of his 1913 medical school class. The class, with men from all ethnicities, selected Kahn because of "his great physical strength combined with courage."[43] As a Jew, this distinction provided proof of inclusion in American society, something Kahn would take for granted his entire life. The regimentation of medical school helped him value military training. In the service he found commonalities not only with doctors of varied ethnic groups, but also with other officers in his AEF unit.[44] His abilities, along with progressive scientific methods and efficacies learned in medical school, propelled Kahn beyond his immigrant home.[45] From this point on, Kahn's identity did not hinge only on his ethnic background or his immigrant family, but also on his being a member of the American professional class.

After graduation from Northwestern Medical School in 1913, Kahn accepted an internship at Chicago's Michael Reese Hospital and soon afterward became affiliated with the South Chicago Community Hospital. When the United States entered the war, Jacob Frank, a surgeon at Michael Reese who had served as a lieutenant colonel in the army, encouraged young doctors to enlist.[46] Soon Kahn, 27, joined the over forty thousand other American Jews who enlisted,[47] becoming a lieutenant in the AEF. Indeed, he so wanted to serve that he volunteered in Boston, as the Chicago contingent had filled its medical quota (almost eight thousand Jews joined the medical corps).[48] Kahn served with men from the Northeast in the 303rd Field Artillery Regiment. This regiment became part of the 76th Division, a U.S. Army division formed in April of 1917 after the United States declared war on Germany. Populated

43 "The Syllabus," Northwestern University, Class of 1912, 307.

44 For scientific-management training in the Progressive Era see Ford, *Americans All!* especially the introduction.

45 Medical school classes focused on classroom lectures, laboratory work, and abundant time in hospital clinics for observation and supervised training with patients. *Northwestern University Bulletin*, "The Medical School: Annual Catalogue 1910–11" (Evanston, 1910).

46 Meites, *Jews of Chicago*, 262.

47 Leavitt, "American Jews," 146. Leavitt believes "that there were from 40,000 to 50,000 Jewish volunteers in the service."

48 Ibid., 143.

by volunteers and draftees, it joined Regular Army Divisions and the newly federalized National Guard Divisions.[49]

Kahn's first military experience came in May of 1918 when, before heading overseas, he was sent to Fort Oglethorpe in Georgia, the army's training camp for medical officers. Former civilians, now newly minted soldiers, sent letters home describing their new lifestyle.[50] Kahn depicted camp life for his family, sending his first letters home soon after he reported to Fort Oglethorpe's Camp Greenleaf. Kahn's letters from Georgia give the reader a clue to his concerns. He focused on four main themes: assertions of well-being to reassure family members, descriptions of his activities, concern for the health of those at home, and yearning for letters from home. His letters were rarely negative; usually they sought to give his family an upbeat picture of his new military lifestyle. It is hard to discern whether he portrayed events as he saw them or made his experience sound pleasant for his family. Even when he complained about the heat and the long, strenuous days of working outside, he emphasized the value of these experiences.

Training Begins

The Georgia camp, established in the Chickamauga National Battlefield Park in May of 1917, only operated for eighteen months.[51] It trained 6,640 officers and 31,138 enlisted men; on average, 2,619 officers

49 The division (minus its Medical Corps that trained in Georgia) formed and trained in Massachusetts at Camp Devens, a recently created post that first opened its doors in September 1917, after the United States entered the war.

50 There were training camps in all corners of the country with military names including: Devens (Massachusetts), Funston (Kansas), Grant (Illinois), Upton (New York), Fremont (California), Logan (Texas), and Wheeler (Georgia). For additional letters from Jewish soldiers, see special war columns in the Jewish press including Chicago's *Sentinel* and Cincinnati's *American Israelite*. Collections containing letters are archived at the AJA and the AJHS.

51 It was established under a 1917 plan that placed military training facilities on battlefields and national park lands. These lands were managed by the War Department. See https://www.nps.gov/articles/chickamaugawwi.htm (accessed 7 February 2018); https://gettysburgcompiler.org/2015/03/02/a-useable-past-first-world-war-training-camps-on-civil-war-battlefields/ (accessed 7 February 2018).

trained at one time.[52] These new medical officers would serve in motor field units, mule-drawn units, and hospitals. Built on swampland, the camp required a drainage ditch before the army could construct barracks, a mess hall, lavatories, an auditorium, a hostess house (visitor facilities for relatives of soldiers who wanted to spend time with their sons before they departed overseas), and a library adjacent to the parade ground.[53] Although the land became dry, the weather was still uncomfortably hot and humid. Formal training commenced in June of 1917. However, demonstrating the military's lack of preparedness for the war, the camp did not reach its "potentiality for efficient work" until September of 1918, two months before the war's end.[54] Inexperienced commanders failed to order supplies and equipment, causing delays in processing officers through the camp.[55]

When Kahn arrived at Camp Greenleaf, the camp was receiving 585 medical officers per month, while in the same period, 513 men finished their training and rejoined their units.[56] These men, all medical school graduates, had spent years of their lives studying to be professionals, not soldiers. This had to change when they entered military service and were instructed: "You are now a Soldier of the United States; a Soldier Selected by your Country to fight for the Freedom of the World. . . . WALK like a soldier, THINK like a soldier, ACT like a soldier, BE A SOLDIER."[57]

The battalion's training regimen became a common subject of letters. The program required monthly three-day practice marches of six to seven miles a day, where the men carried their own supplies and camped in the field. Campfire conferences in the evening educated men

52 William N. Bispham, *The Medical Department of the United States Army in the World War,* VII (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1927), 26, available online at http://history.amedd.army.mil/booksdocs/wwi/VolVII/ch02part1.html (accessed 14 July 2017).

53 Ibid.,17.

54 Ibid., 19. When Kahn left Camp Greenleaf in mid-June of 1918 program upgrades had started. On 6 June a morale officer was assigned. Ibid., 61.

55 Ibid., 22.

56 Ibid., 25.

57 Ibid., 63.

on topics such as foot care and camp cookery.[58] On a steamy Georgia June day, Kahn wrote of his march:

> I have been away from here since Thursday a.m. on a hike. It was long, tedious, and very difficult. The weather was extremely unfavorable and the first rain storm we had since I've been here was the first night of our camp. During this storm we were flooded away got good & wet, remained awake all night and traveled again the next day. The walk was long and tiring, but the experience was wonderful. [59]

This is just one example of a letter that leads the reader to expect a negative conclusion, but after a variety of complaints reaches a positive resolution. He went on to comment that these hikes and other strenuous physical work prepared them for campaign marches and that he was grateful that he was getting stronger. Growing up in an urban center, it is likely that Kahn had not experienced a great deal of outdoor exercise.

Not all of their training involved preparing for battle. When they arrived at camp, officers took an oral exam in general medicine and surgery, as well as in their specialties.[60] Taught "university style," the medical officers' program was conceived as a three-month course.[61] Lecture topics varied from using military supplies in the field to regulations and proper use of a soldier's equipment.[62] In the second week of instruction, French language study became a part of their coursework. Classes were separated by regiment. This led to flexibility; as the situation changed and/or men required specialized training, new groups could be assembled and older groups dismantled. To boost morale, the camp presented soldiers with periodic lectures with titles such as: "Why we are at War," "Why we are sure to Win the War," "Traditions in the American Army," and "Opportunities of Self-Improvement in the Army."[63] When not in class

58 Ibid., 75–77.

59 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 9 June 1918.

60 Bispham, *Medical Department*, 72.

61 Ibid., 18, 71.

62 Ibid., 73–75.

63 Ibid., 69. Also see Ford, *Americans All!,* especially 3–15.

or at lectures, the men could take part in a few entertainment programs and recreational activities.[64]

Some of the details in Kahn's letters, including time allotted for meals and training, cannot be reconciled with official camp schedules. This could be because many programs were in flux until a few weeks before Kahn left for overseas. It would seem strange that he would alter reports of his schedule for family members. In one of his first letters home, Kahn wrote to his sister, Ray Greenwald:

> Dear Sister:
> Excuse me for not writing sooner but I was terribly busy. I wish to thank you a million times for the elegant party you gave for me before I left. That week was the reverse to this last one. This one was hard work from 5:45 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. without a minute rest and only 15 minutes allowed for each meal.[65]

According to the official histories, however, the doctors rose at 6:00 AM, exercised, ate breakfast, cleaned their quarters, then drilled and attended lectures until a noontime dinner; afterward they returned to the morning schedule of drilling and lectures until a 6:00 PM supper. This official schedule allows more free time than Kahn's correspondence portrayed.

From the letters the reader is able to puzzle out the questions asked by relatives at home. Before movies and television's "M*A*S*H" brought military doctors into our homes, Kahn sought to describe his living conditions to his family. To his sister, Kahn explained what it was to "live out of a trunk."

> Each man in the barracks,… is permitted to have a small space to contain 1 cot—with blankets—& pillow—1 trunk and 1 traveling bag. 1 hook on the wall, which must contain only 1 overcoat or raincoat & 1

64 However, these activities were not open to African Americans. They served in segregated units which were not permitted to attend group programs and entertainments. A tent, provided by the YMCA, staged separate programing for them. Bispham, *Medical Department*, 69. Kahn never mentioned the ethnicity, race, or religion of his fellow soldiers.

65 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 12 May 1918.

> suit. Other than the clothes on this hook, nothing—absolutely nothing dare be left outside a fellow's trunk a minute…. You can imagine the predicament. But, we get used to it soon. Once or twice daily an Inspector comes around at an unknown time & examines everything. If a button or a coat or breeches on the wall is unbuttoned or a blanket not folded absolutely in regulation style you have something severe to account for.[66]

Comparing what he wrote with camp histories shows that Kahn provided his family with an accurate account of this aspect of barrack life. The regulations specified everything he described, including that clothing had "reasonable attitude toward fit."[67]

In another letter, Kahn extolled the benefits of his new lifestyle and at the same time demonstrated his allegiance to his country, writing: "I am feeling very well, in fact better than I ever have before. I have been here almost a month, and thank God have not felt a sign of a headache. That's a great deal for me."[68] He went on, expressing gratitude to the country his parents immigrated to: "If this life does nothing more for me than to cure my headaches I have the United States to bless for ever & ever. And in my firm belief from the strength I have gained in the short time here. I owe my Country a great deal for all it's done for me."[69]

On the day following Kahn's letter about his newfound health, concerns at home about the war effort grew. Headlines in *The Chicago Daily Tribune* read, "FOE 55 MILES FROM PARIS."[70] Family at home worried not only about the war, but also about the welfare of their soldiers, including their diet. They often sent cakes and other favorites. After

66 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 30 May 1918.

67 Bispham, *Medical Department*, 64. The military adopted scientific time-management ideas as used in early twentieth-century manufacturing. For example, see the 1916 *Manual of Intensive Training,* which stressed efficiency and sought to put an end to the "duplication of efforts, misdirection of energy, waste of time … and mismanagement of individual tasks." As quoted in Ford, *Americans All!*.

68 A similar thought was expressed by a Jewish soldier from Massachusetts, who wrote home, "I feel great. The best that I have felt in a long time." Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders*, 71.

69 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 30 May 1918.

70 *The Chicago Daily Tribune* (31 May 1918): 1.

describing a typical day of rising early for physical training, which he stated he enjoyed, one serviceman asked his parents to send him tobacco, cake, and chocolate.[71] The camp regulations stated that meals should be "wholesome, not dainty."[72]

Kahn wrote of the camp's offerings: "We are getting wonderful meal[s] with plenty home grown fresh vegetables and berries."[73] He told his sister not to send food, because he had all he needed. Kahn emphasized the high quality of food throughout his correspondence—although if the camp had served poor-quality food, it is likely that Kahn would not have mentioned it, as this would worry his family. While he was raised in an Orthodox home, Kahn did not seem troubled by the lack of kosher food; however, none of his letters from training camp mention eating meat. Probably the medical officers' meals resembled those served to other soldiers at Camp Oglethorpe—which included for Passover "roasted pork and matzoth."[74] Whether this was someone's idea of a celebratory meal or an antisemitic statement is unclear.

Kahn wrote some of his letters in pencil from his quarters; if he wanted to write in pen, he was required to go to the camp's YMCA, which also provided the men with stationery. Under the auspices of the Commission on Training Camp Activities, the YMCA at the training camps and in Europe provided a place where men could spend their limited free time in what the military called a "'clean and wholesome' environment."[75] Led by Progressive reformers, the aim of the YMCA

71 Letter from Irwin E. Basler from Camp Sheridan to his parents, 11 September 1917. Published as "Letter from a Young Soldier," *The American Israelite* (20 September 1917): 8.

72 Bispham, *Medical Department*, 64.

73 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 12 May 1918.

74 Fax, *Bare Hands*, 65.

75 Secretary of War Newton D. Baker appointed Raymond B. Fosdick in 1917 to head the Commission on Training Camp Activities. The CTCA was charged with providing activities for soldiers that would help them avoid boredom (a problem in earlier wars) and lead them away from immoral activities. These services were to be open to all men regardless of religious affiliation. The YMCA became a civilian partner with the government to administer these programs. See Ford, *Americans All!,* 88–111, quote on 89. However, both Catholic and Jewish leaders questioned the YMCA's ability to be nonsectarian. The Knights of Columbus and the Jewish Welfare Board were eventually

in the military was to keep men "away from negative influences such as prostitution, alcohol, and gambling and direct them to positive alternatives like sports, music, and reading."[76] By June 1918 representatives of the Knights of Columbus and the Jewish Welfare Board joined the YMCA with "huts" in the camp, but the extent of their activities is unclear during the dates of Kahn's training.[77]

Most of Kahn's letters demonstrate his strong bond with family; this theme would remain foremost throughout his military service. In early May of 1918 he wrote to his sister Ray, "I miss the folks more than ever. I don't know if I will be able to hold out away from them."[78] To combat his loneliness and assist his father, Kahn requested that his sister send their father to visit him. He believed that the warm spring in the South would improve the health of his father, who was often ill. He even offered to pay for the trip and provide for his parents if his father would take a break from his long workdays at his Chicago store. However, these plans never came to fruition.

Deployment

In mid-June, just six weeks into the specialized three-month program for medical officers, Kahn's unit ordered him to report to Camp Devens in Massachusetts. According to camp historians, "due to urgent military necessity, many officers had to be detailed away from camp before the course was completed and therefore these men were only partially trained."[79]

At Camp Devens, Kahn rejoined the 76th Division as part of the 151st Artillery Brigade serving with the 303rd Field Artillery Regiment. He wrote to his sister, "I understand I have a wonderful appointment."[80]

---

designated to provide additional services. For a full discussion of the JWB's creation and lasting effects see Jessica Cooperman, "The Jewish Welfare Board and Religious Pluralism in the American Military of World War I," *American Jewish History*, 98, no. 4 (October, 2014): 239; first annual report of the JWB, New York, 1919, AJHS, New York.

76 Ford, *Americans All!* 9.

77 Bispham, *Medical Department*, 61.

78 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 12 May l918.

79 Bispham, *Medical Department*, 71.

80 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 18 June 1918.

The population of Camp Devens demonstrated the vast diversity of the AEF. Just a month after Kahn left Camp Devens for Europe, the army completed a survey of the religious affiliations of the camp's soldiers. A high percentage of the 25,607 soldiers—mostly from the Northeast—were immigrants, reflecting the population of the area's ethnic centers. The survey found 11,731 Catholics and 931 Jews, with most of the rest belonging to different denominations of Christianity, from Greek Orthodox to Quaker. The balance included thirty Muslims and sixty Mormons, along with a small number of Dursi, spiritualists, agnostics, and others.[81]

Kahn's multi-ethnic unit left Camp Devens via the East Boston harbor on 16 July 1918.[82] The United States did not have sufficient troop transport ships, so they boarded the Australian HMT *Miltiades*, an eight-thousand-ton Aberdeen line ship. The ship came pre-equipped with foods to the liking of Australians and foreign to most young Americans. This became, for many, their first experiance of life beyond U.S. borders. The ship traveled to Halifax, Canada, with two additional transports, a destroyer, and two chasers.[83] At Halifax, the *Miltiades* joined a large convoy of twenty-two ships guarded by the HMS *Berwick*, a British armed cruiser built in 1903, already past its prime.[84]

On the trip across the Atlantic, Kahn encountered danger for the first time: On 29 July, the convoy faced "violent" German submarine attacks, and American and British destroyers dropped depth bombs.[85] The same

81 For the complete study see Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders*, 408.

82 An examination of the names of the men in Kahn's medical unit reveals a multiplicity of ethnic backgrounds. For example: Alphonse Quirron, Henry C. Severance, John W. Wotawa, Harry A.Clark, and of course, Kahn. 303rd Medical Detachment, *The G.P.F. Book: Regimental History of the Three Hundred and Third Field Artillery* (unknown publisher and date, circa 1921), 363–364.

83 Ibid., 24.

84 For more about the HMS *Berwick* see http://www.berwick-cittaslow.org.uk/hmsberwick.html (accessed 24 July 2017).

85 *G.P.F. Book*, 24. In 1917 Germany commenced "unlimited submarine warfare." Their aim was to cut off supplies to England and France by closing the Atlantic corridor. This would, in their evaluation, also stop the possibility of American troops' reaching the war zone. The Allies did not have the technology to locate submarines in sufficient numbers

day, the *Chicago Tribune* reported a U-boat attack during a transatlantic crossing.[86] Describing the crossing to his sister as "uneventful,"[87] Kahn used this letter, like others that followed, to reassure his family that his experiences sharply differed from what they read in the local press.

By 31 July the convoy safely reached Newport, England. There the regiment marched through town, where the mayor greeted them before they boarded a train for the Winnal Down Rest Camp in Winchester; they remained there for two days' rest.[88] For Kahn, the stay in England provided the hope of connecting with family. Although born in Cincinnati, Kahn, like many children of immigrants, had family outside of the United States. In addition to family in Russia and Sweden, he had relatives not far from where his regiment camped. He wrote to his sister that his regiment was "located about 15–18 miles from Dad's people, but the Commanding officer refused to allow any of the men to leave Camp. So, I was unable to visit them. I heard from uncle and told him I was certainly going to visit them on my first 'leave of absence.'"[89] Unfortunately, due to the lack of transportation during wartime, his visit was postponed indefinitely.

This was Kahn's first taste of foreign travel, something that would become a habit for him later in life. On 4 August the regiment boarded the USS *Yale* for Le Havre, France; there the deputy mayor welcomed them with flowers.[90] From the port the 303rd Regiment traveled by train about 349 kilometers south of Paris to its new training area not far from the city of Clermont-Ferrand, where they arrived on 7 August to

---

to prevent attacks. Adam Hochschild, *To End All Wars: A Story of Loyalty and Rebellion, 1914–1918* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), 247–248.

86 http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1918/07/29/page/3/article/liner-to-u-s-has-3-u-boat-fights-during-one-trip (accessed 24 July 2017).

87 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 29 July 1918.

88 *G.P.F. Book*, 24.

89 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 20 September 1918.

90 *G.P.F. Book*, 24. By the summer of 1918 American troops arrived in Europe in greater numbers: 245,000 in May, 278,000 in June, and 306,000 in July. The 303rd arrived in August toward the end of the American-European transport. David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 177.

continue their abbreviated training and wait for French armaments.[91] The 3rd Battalion billeted near the town of Beaumont.[92] Having "passed through Paris and many other beautiful cities," Kahn, who thoroughly enjoyed the trip,[93] shared the news of the regiment's status with his family at home: "Apparently we are going to get from three to four months service with the unit while they are getting their advance training before we get any real active service at the front. No doubt that it will be every bit of three months. As the men in the [artillery] regiment need more training as many of them are only in the service a short time."[94]

The 303rd, in fact, did remain in Beaumont for three months, where they prepared for the front. Contemplating his unit's entry into actual warfare, Kahn lamented, "I wish it were sooner, as I am terribly anxious to see some of the real thing. As long as I am giving my services I would feel better if they could be used to better advantage with the boys."[95] As a new National Army Division, the 76th was last in line behind the regular divisions and the federalized National Guard to be issued the equipment needed for battle and therefore saw only a relatively short time in combat.

Once his regiment was headquartered near Clermont-Ferrand, Kahn used a historical reference to let his family know of his location. In a

91 According to Paul W. Grasmehr, reference coordinator, Pritzker Military Museum & Library, "The 151st Field Artillery Brigade consisted of a field artillery regiment equipped with 75mm (3-inch) guns, a field artillery regiment equipped with 4.7-inch guns, the 303rd Field Artillery Regiment, armed with the French G.P.F., a 6-inch (155mm) rifles and a Trench Mortar Battery. The artillery pieces assigned to the 303rd Field Artillery Regiment, twenty-four assigned to the regiment in three eight-gun battalions, could hit targets 10.4 miles in the enemy rear areas. These targets were located by U.S. or Allied observation aircraft or balloons. The targets engaged were typically enemy supply depots, rail heads used for moving men and materials or troop concentrations moving from one sector of the front to another." Email to author, 16 June 2017.

92 According to Eddy Oziol, historian, Academy of Clermont-Ferrand, who has been documenting the AEF in Puy de Dôme, where Kahn was stationed, more than thirty thousand U.S. soldiers were billeted in the area between 1917 and 1919. Email to author, 5 January 2018. For more about the region and Americans during WWI see Oziol's Facebook group: 1917–1919. Les Américains dans le Puy de Dôme. Une histoire retrouvée.

93 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 11 August 1918.

94 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 29 July 1918.

95 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 11 August 1918.

letter to his sister-in-law he described the region's geography and historic importance:

> Dear Bess,
>
> At last I am permanently settled in the Southern part of France, where the flowers and breezes refresh the air, and the sun keeps us warm.
>
> I am located in a beautiful part of the country only a short distance from Spain. The weather is beautiful, and the surroundings great. We are surrounded by beautiful mountains, also historically famous ones. The Battle between Caesar and the Gauls was fought here, and as an everlasting memorial they have erected a beautiful castle [Montrognon] on the summit of the highest mountain here.[96]

While seemingly quite descriptive, this passage causes the reader several quandaries. Clermont-Ferrand is located in central, not southern, France, and it is more than three hundred miles from the Spanish border. There are several possible explanations for this misinformation. First, perhaps Kahn was unfamiliar with French geography; he might have considered Clermont-Ferrand "southern" France because it is south of Paris and certainly not in the northern or western parts of the country, where the war raged. Also, he may have considered the three-hundred-mile trip to Spain relatively short because he was accustomed to U.S. geography, where distances are greater—for example, the distance between his home in Chicago and Los Angeles, where he had family, is about two thousand miles. Or it could be further subterfuge to confuse the censor. All is speculation.

The second part of the paragraph describes the location of a specific battle. In 52 BCE Vercingetorix, the leader of Gallic forces, defeated Julius Caesar's Roman Republic Army near Clermont-Ferrand at the Battle of Gergovia. A monument built by Napoleon III to honor Vercingetorix's victory still stands on the Gergovie plateau, which

96 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Bessie Kahn, 18 August 1918. The day before, Kahn wrote a similar letter to his sister: "Am settled now, in southern Sunny France, where the weather is more beautiful…. We are situated between the mountains and the scenery all around us is most beautiful." Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 17 August 1918.

overlooks Clermont-Ferrand. [97] The historical reference in the letter assumed that the reader had an understanding of history and the availability of reference books.[98] Therefore, with a little research, the family in Chicago knew exactly where Kahn resided.

In this beautiful region, far from the front, it was Kahn's responsibility to teach and supervise the detachment, making sure that they had knowledge of proper first-aid techniques. As the battalion surgeon, he advised "the unit commander on health and sanitation and preventative medicine."[99] Sometimes he had to fill the demanding role as the military representative of humanitarian principles: to "preserve life and restore … the health of the sick and wounded" and to keep morale high, letting the men know that every effort would be made to make them well and whole.[100] The only physician on duty, he directed a medical detachment of 12 men responsible for the health of 450 men. In his infirmary he treated the ill and wounded. The doctors and their patients benefited from recent medical advances, including anesthesia, antisepsis, and triage and blood transfusion procedures.[101] Outside of injuries, men most likely sought medical attention for one of five conditions: influenza, venereal disease, mumps, measles, or tuberculosis.[102] It was here that Kahn's Northwestern and hospital training in modern medical techniques became paramount.

Kahn wrote: "We are so far from the battle fields that we don't even know that there is such a thing as War going on."[103] He told his family: "When I was in the States I occasionally heard some war news, but here

97 http://www.france-voyage.com/tourism/gergovie-plateau-1406.htm (accessed 26 July 2017).

98 It is interesting to note that this reference was only given in the letter to his sister-in-law, not repeated in a similar letter to his sister.

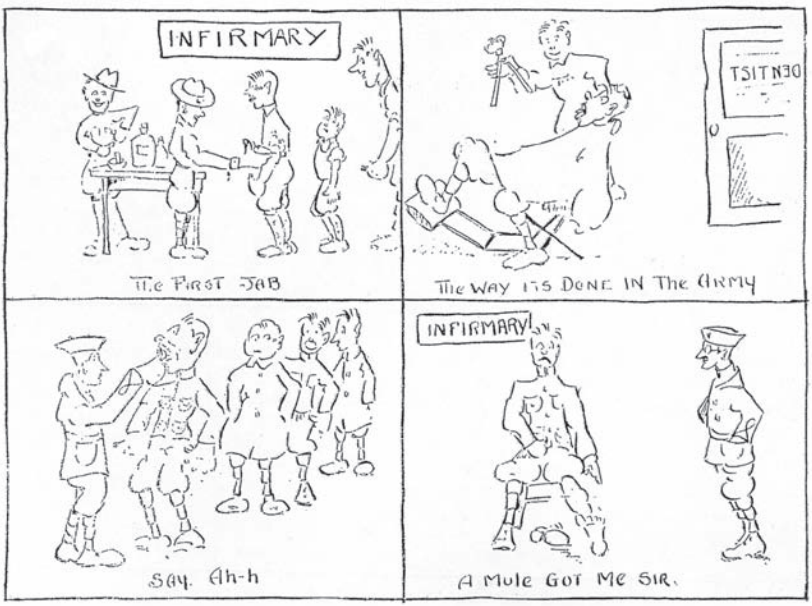
99 Email from Sanders Marble, senior historian, History Branch, Army Medical Department Center of History and Heritage, U.S. Army Medical Command, 26 June 2017.

100 Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders*, 570.

101 Ibid., 566.

102 Ibid., 569.

103 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 17 August 1918.



The G.P.F. Book: Regimental History of the Three Hundred and Third Field Artillery (c. 1921), p. 363. The doctor in the last panel is Kahn.

I'm so isolated, never see a newspaper."[104] Removed from the war effort, the battalion fought local fires when needed.[105] The artillery regiment did not receive its first big guns for training until 25 August, three weeks after they arrived in France.[106] At the time of the American entrance in the war, few training manuals in English for artillery armaments even existed.[107]

When the regiment was healthy, Kahn did not have much to do. He told his sister-in-law, "I am having a good time here, and living the life of ease.… I enjoy the work most immensely."[108] He reported to his sister: "Food is plentiful and we get anything we want."[109] As the artillery still

104 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Bessie Kahn, 18 August 1918.

105 It is likely that some of the fires were caused by the Americans themselves, as lighting matches outside of restricted areas was a problem. Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders*, 152.

106 *G.P.F. Book*, 24.

107 See "Training—The Army at War With Itself," Fax, *Bare Hands*, especially 100–101.

108 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Bessie Kahn, 18 August 1918.

109 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 17 August 1918. According to Eddy Oziol, historian, Academy of Clermont-Ferrand, "Life is beautiful for an American

needed training and they were far from danger, there is no reason to believe that Kahn's account is too far off the mark.

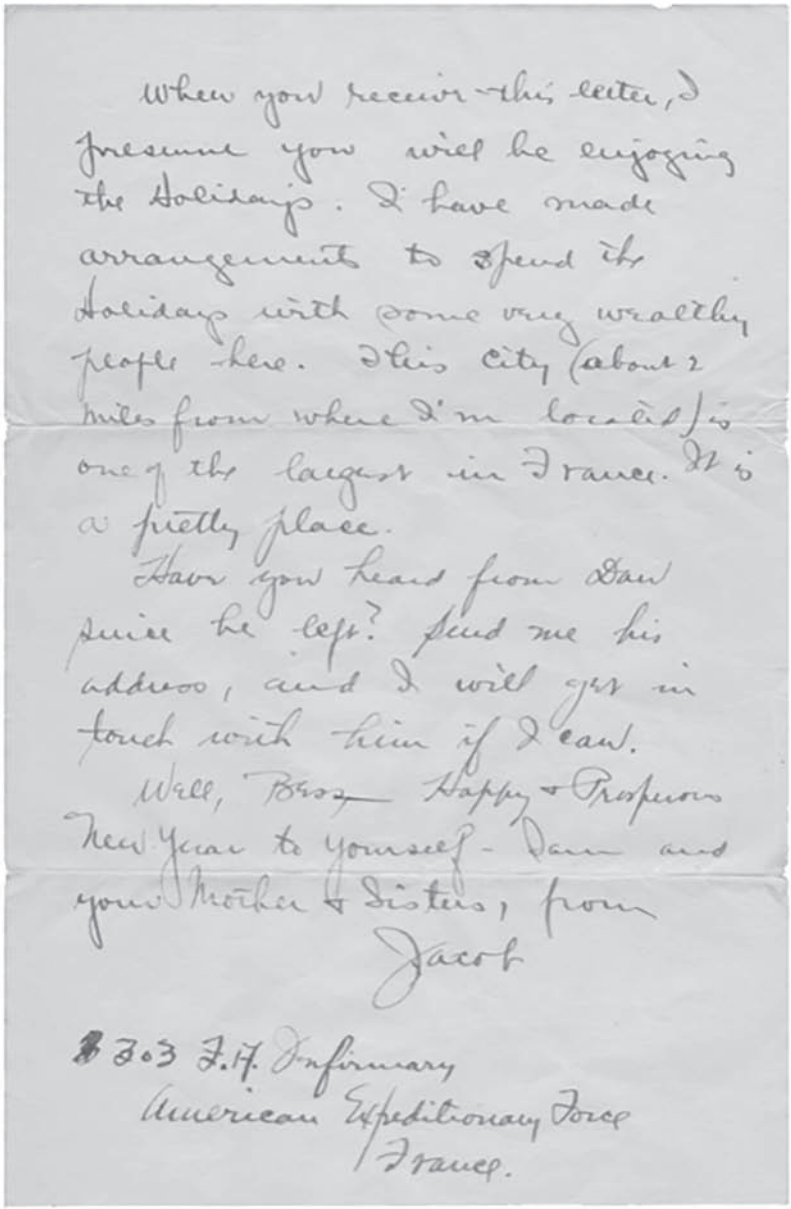
In the early fall of 1918, beyond good food and beautiful scenery, Kahn wanted to celebrate the High Holidays. The military ordered furloughs for Jewish soldiers not engaged in military operations, and the Jewish Welfare Board provided services for many Jewish soldiers; however, Kahn does not mention any Jewish organization or contact with other Jewish servicemen.[110] Instead, he wrote, "I have made arrangements to spend the Holidays with some very wealthy people here. This city [Clermont-Ferrand] (about 2 miles from where I'm located) is one of the largest in France."[111] By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some Eastern European Jews had migrated to France, most settling in Paris.[112] The Jewish community of Clermont-Ferrand

officer. They are very far from the ravages and destruction of war, and even if Kahn recognized that there are no men in the villages. Food is abundant for American soldiers, as they are supplied by the American Army. The Americans could buy alcohol, wine and fruit, whatever they wanted; they could afford to pay more than local villagers." Email to author, 5 January 2018. Because of this disparity of wealth, the American presence was a mixed blessing for locals. They contributed funds to the local economy, but at the same time, they priced locals out of the market.

110 The military made the furloughs possible by ordering that "'soldiers of the Jewish faith serving in the American Expeditionary Forces will be excused from all duty, and where deemed practicable, granted passes, to enable them to observe in their customary manner' the Jewish religious holidays." As quoted in Ford, *Americans All!* 122. For a contemporary account see: Rabbi Lee J. Levinger, *A Jewish Chaplain in France* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), 10–26. In October of 1918, of the 789 chaplains stationed in France, only 5 were Jewish. Most chaplains were stationed with combat units. All chaplains were trained to minister to men of different religious affiliations. Therefore, a Jewish chaplain could administer Catholic last rites and a Catholic chaplain could lead a Jewish service. Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders*, 420–425. During World War I the military commissioned twenty-five rabbis, twelve of whom served the AEF in Europe. See Cooperman, "Jewish Welfare Board," especially 254n43, 252–255.

111 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Bessie Kahn, 18 August 1918. For more about how Jewish soldiers celebrated see Laskin, *Long Way Home*, 233–234.

112 As cited by Hyman, between 1881 and 1914 approximately 2 million East European Jews arrived in the United States, 120,000 in England, and only 44,000 in France, with 80 percent settling in Paris. Paula E. Hyman, *The Jews of Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 116.



When you receive this letter, I presume you will be enjoying the Holidays. I have made arrangements to spend the Holidays with some very wealthy people here. This city (about 2 miles from where I'm located) is one of the largest in France. It is a pretty place.

Have you heard from Dan since he left? Send me his address, and I will get in touch with him if I can.

Well, Bro — Happy & Prosperous New Year to yourself - Dan and your Mother & Sisters, from

Jacob

#303 F.H. Infirmary
American Expeditionary Force
France.

Letter from Jacob Kahn to Bessie Kahn, 18 August 1918.
(Courtesy of the author)

was relatively small in 1918, consisting of maybe thirty families, most of whom probably ran merchant businesses such as clothing stores. Some had lived in the region for twenty-five years or more and were well ensconced in the community.[113]

After the holidays Kahn reported to his sister, "I met some wonderful people here. I spent the Holidays with these people, and no doubt a King could not be treated as Royal."[114] A month later, Kahn again mentioned the couple: "I wrote to you, about the way I spent the Holidays, Well! These people just insist on taking up most of my spare time entertaining me and I can assure you that they do it too. I have never met such a hospitable and lovely couple. I enjoy their company a great deal."[115] Unfortunately, Kahn did not use their names, and nothing else is known about his hosts. It is unclear whether he sought out local Jews, they sought him out, or a Jewish organization arranged their meeting. But it is apparent that their friendship and the chance to observe the holidays meant a great deal to him.[116]

Historically, the region where Clermont-Ferrand is situated is significant; it is the location of the first documented synagogue in France and the first *ketubah*, dating from 1319. Three places testify to the town's Jewish history: Rue Fontgiève (Fountain of the Jews), Hill of Monjuzet

113 John F. Sweets, *Choices in Vichy France: The French under Nazi Occupation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 128–130. In 1942 there were seventy Jewish businesses in the region, the majority clothing related.

114 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 20 September 1918.

115 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 6 October 1918.

116 This type of relationship was unusual; it was more common for the two peoples to find fault with each other. Rabbi Lee J. Levinger wrote in his World War I memoir, "A small minority of our men did penetrate into French life and grew to love it; a minority of the French made the acquaintance of Americans and came to respect them." Levinger, *Jewish Chaplain*, 65. It seems likely that Kahn and the French couple found commonality in their Jewish ethnicity and social class. I still hope to find out something about the couple and how they came to invite Kahn to spend the holidays with them. Months later, while waiting for transport home, Kahn wrote of his continuing contact with the couple from Clermont-Ferrand, "I had another letter from my friends in Clerrmont [*sic*]. They send me cookies and cake etc. They are wonderful people. I cannot begin to describe my feeling toward them. I don't presume I shall ever forget them." Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 28 December 1918.

(Jewish mountain), and Rue du Faubourg des Juifs (area of the Jews).[117] Over the centuries, the Jewish community has formed and re-formed several times. The first community arrived at the time of the Roman Legion. They were forced to flee or convert in 576, and the synagogue was destroyed. The community reconstituted in the thirteenth century but was expelled again in the fourteenth century. In 1780 a new community was established, and in 1808 it was recognized officially as an organized Jewish community. The Synagogue des Quatre-Passeports was established in 1862; by 1872, it had about one hundred members.[118] The Association Culturelle Israelite de Clermont-Ferrand formed in 1906 and has remained the primary Jewish association in the city. Its mandate includes worship, public service, and representation of the Jewish community with the community-at-large. It is possible that Kahn met the "hospitable couple" though this association.

While Kahn seemed to enjoy his personal experiences, his letters show that he believed the military did not respect him. While in the training encampment, Kahn sought to be promoted from lieutenant to captain. He witnessed two doctors in his detachment promoted as well as doctors from his Chicago Jewish neighborhood.[119] He was annoyed when, as he wrote to his sister, Ray, "I was informed to-day that I was too young to be promoted in the Medical Corps and have started a noise about it. I personally feel that any man that makes a statement of that sort is a 'dam fool.'"[120] Kahn, twenty-eight at the time, was about the

117 http://juif-clermont.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=67&Itemid=27 (accessed 27 July 2017).

118 Ibid.

119 "Medical," *G.P.F. Book*, 358. For example, two doctors Kahn was in contact with, Daniel Leventhal and Joe Lebowitz, were both captains. Others returned home with promotions.

120 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 20 September 1918. "Rank was a contentious subject for doctors; they wanted higher rank and status and (in a nutshell) the Army as a whole declined to value doctors as highly as doctors valued themselves. There were many facets to the problem since there were different types of officers' commissions during the war (Regular Army, National Guard, and National Army to name the three main ones, but also Medical Reserve Corps and Officers' Reserve Corps) and what was true right then may have been true for a brief moment." Email from Sanders Marble to the author, 26 June 2017.

same age as other doctors he knew who had received promotions. It is unknown if Kahn made "noise" with his commanders and/or representatives back home. Whatever he did, he was not successful; he remained a lieutenant for the rest of his service.

As the months in France wore on, the subjects of Kahn's letters changed slightly. Although he continued to be very concerned about the health of his family at home, his letters now shared observations about the French people and the war itself. In early October of 1918 he wrote of missing his nieces and nephew, then added, "Children are rarities here in France. The War being almost five years in this country the youngsters have grown up so that those of age were taken into the service, and the younger ones are now almost at the age limit."[121] As a doctor who attended to children in civilian life, he especially noted the lack of children in the cities around him. This letter reinforces that Kahn was not isolated in the military camp but free to observe local communities. After the war ended, he wrote: "I have never realized how fortunate we are to be Americans but after seeing other countries I can assure any American that he is living in luxury in U.S. even if he is the poorest man in the County."[122] Like many Americans he appreciated the historic sights of Europe, but he was shocked to see the effects of many years of war.

The Front and Other Perils

At the end of September, six weeks before the armistice, the 3rd Battalion finally left Beaumont for the artillery range near Randonne.[123] This range provided training for all field artillery units. As part of the new 76th National Army Division, the 151st Artillery Brigade reached the range only after other units completed their training. After two months in France, Kahn happily announced to his family that his unit was finally away from their comfortable billets.

---

121 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 6 October 1918. Kahn was not alone in these sentiments. A common theme in men's writings was the "devastation that the war had wrought" on the lives of French and British citizens. See Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders*, 187.

122 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 17 December 1918.

123 *G.P.F. Book*, 27.

> Our men went to the Guns [large artillery] a few days ago and seem to be doing fine. I had 26 new sick this a.m. but none of them very serious. I am the only Med. Officer in the Battalion and have plenty of work to keep me busy. Well, will save some news for some other time. My hands are very cold and so I'm going over to the kitchen to warm them.[124]

As their medical officer, Kahn lived with the troops at the training site and began tending to those who were ill. It is likely that some of the newly ill suffered with influenza; the pandemic swept the world in the fall of 1918. Twenty-six men reporting sick in one day—more than 5 percent of the 450 men—was a high number for Kahn's unit. Kahn chose not to mention the epidemic to his family.[125] At the beginning of the outbreak, the military and doctors, including Kahn, probably did not understand the severity of the illness. It only became a "reportable disease" for doctors on 7 October 1918, the day after the above letter was written.[126] According to Eddy Oziol, a historian of the Clermont-Ferrand region, "In October 1918 there was a terrible epidemic of … [influenza, which was very] contagious" in the local area.[127] Twenty members of the 303rd Field Artillery unit died and were buried at the Clermont-Ferrand American Cemetery during the three months they were stationed there, far from the dangers of the front lines.[128] Oziol believes that many of the dead perished as a result of the epidemic.[129] The 1918 pandemic affected the young and strong

124 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 6 October 1918. These dates and weather match the period when the artillery moved from the plains to the Puy de Dôme mountain for artillery practice. According to Eddy Oziol, historian, Academy of Clermont-Ferrand, this is when the cold weather sets in. Email to author, 5 January 2018.

125 Kahn's sister, Ray Greenwald, suffered from influenza later that fall. Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 15 December 1918.

126 Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders*, 587–588.

127 Eddy Oziol, historian, Academy of Clermont-Ferrand, email to author, 5 January 2018.

128 According to Oziol, Kahn's unit remained the healthiest of the three regiments stationed in the region. The other two regiments lost seventy and forty-eight men, respectively, during the same three months. Eddy Oziol, historian, Academy of Clermont-Ferrand. Email to author, 5 January 2018.

129 Ibid.

more often than the elderly and young children.[130] Approximately one in four AEF soldiers contracted influenza during the war; more Americans died due to influenza-related illness than were killed in combat.[131]

At the same time Kahn was facing influenza in his unit, he described the primitive living conditions for his family, transforming the discomfort into an adventure:

> Sister, our Regiment is in the field now, camping out. It's a new and wonderful experience. We left our Billets on the first and are here a week now. We live in dog tents, sleep on the ground and its cold as "hell" up here, Eat in the open with frozen fingers, where water is frozen and the coffee gets cold before you get it to your lips. Awake in the a.m. and find your bed covered with snow. Its certainly is a wonderful and healthy way to live. Its living with nature sure.[132]

This is a most interesting passage. It gives an accurate portrayal of the circumstances, describing the uncomfortable cold, but then putting the most upbeat interpretation on it as possible, calling the circumstances "healthy" and "wonderful." Here he employed the tactic he confided to his sister-in-law at war's end. Kahn wrote that he lied often to keep the family reassured that he was well, "sliding in and out of the truth," so much so that he often forgot what he had written to whom.[133] However, truth was never the goal of the correspondence; maintaining connections was.

During this time, family continued to be on Kahn's mind. To his teenage niece, Leah, on October 24, less than three weeks before the war's end, he wrote "I've read all your letters to many of the officers here and they enjoy them as much as ever,"[134] noting "We have a very

130 Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders*, 587.

131 Ibid.

132 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 6 October 1918. For a description of tents and billets see Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders*, 146–158.

133 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Bessie Kahn, 12 November 1918.

134 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Leah Greenwald, 24 October 1918.

Leah Greenwald, Kahn's niece.
(Courtesy of Dorothy Kay Schwartz)

sociable and bright set of officers in this Regiment."[135] The camaraderie with his fellow officers grew in importance as they shared letters from home.[136] He gave his niece advice about her education:

> I don't want you to be angry at me for not writing you oftener, as I have been terribly busy and really did not get the chance to. . .Don't you worry about geometry its easy and you can get through it easily. . . .I am having a very nice time and enjoying army life immensely.[137]

135 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 29 July 1918.

136 Kahn was more comfortable writing about his fellow officers with whom he most likely shared education and class than the enlisted men of the unit.

137 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Leah Greenwald, 24 October 1918.

Kahn's duties increased as his battalion prepared to move toward the front. He had less time for writing, and family must have seemed further away. This short excerpt reiterates two primary themes of the correspondence, interest in all matters of home life, and again, reassuring family of his wellbeing by the falsehood of "having a nice time," to making his life sound like a vacation. What he did not want his family to know was that the men of the battalion were well aware of the horrific nature of the front. On 3 October, after witnessing deadly battles in St. Mihiel and Argonne, their colonel reported to the brigade and prepared the men for the combat ahead. [138] It finally became time for the 303rd Field Artillery to see the action; they boarded trains for the front on 1 November and headed for their new assignments.

While the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 303rd Field Artillery Regiment supported American divisions in the St. Mihiel sector, Kahn's 3rd Battalion separated from other American units on 4 November. During the final eight days of the war the 3rd Battalion supported combat operations of the French 39th Army.[139] Stationed behind the infantry, they provided extensive fire support for the French advance to secure the sector near Bois de Haudronville. The 3rd Battalion located the Germans by aircraft or balloon, then targeted enemy supply depots, railheads,

138 *G.P.F. Book*, 27.

139 See https://www.abmc.gov/news-events/news/world-war-i-historic-reference-book-now-available-abmcgov#.Wc11y1tSzcv (scroll down to the lower section with the maps and select the St. Mihiel map) Paul W. Grasmehr, reference coordinator, Pritzker Military Museum & Library pointed out, "there is a sector of the line between the U.S. 33rd Division and the U.S. 28th Division, south of Jonville, that is the responsibility of a French division. It is my understanding that the 3rd Battalion of the 303rd Field Artillery Regiment is temporarily assigned to the operational control of that French division, the French 39th Division, to provide additional fire support so it would be able to advance and clear that woods south of Jonville." According to Grasmehr, "The U.S. generals on Pershing's staff were not convinced the Germans would sue for peace. The phase of the operations that the 303rd Field Artillery participated in the last week of the war had the goal of pressing their advance forward (from north to south) to capture Conflans-en-Jarnisy and Chambley on their drive toward Metz. The next phase of the advance would continue after several weeks or months to resupply and reorganize for the final offensive during the winter or early Spring 1919." Email to author, 29 September 2017.

and road junctions about 10.4 miles away.[140] This assignment proved treacherous, as it placed them within range of enemy artillery. As the American artillery succeeded in disrupting the enemy's ability to resupply and reinforce their positions, they became "priority targets" for the enemy; the Germans in response fired back aggressively "with a mix of high explosive and gas shells."[141]

The battalion faced constant danger as enemy artillery rained down on them. Kahn described the scene: "3 days ago, they got next to us and began to raise 'hell' with us…. They located our positions and made us feel it. And until the last minute they gave us a strong counter-attack with result of a mustard gas shell casualty in our battalion as a finale."[142] According to Paul W. Grasmehr, reference coordinator, Pritzker Military Museum & Library, Kahn "had a heavy burden on his shoulders; he was expected to perform a variety of leadership, administrative and medical tasks that were part of his daily responsibilities in maintaining the health of the men." His job was to enable "the regiment to function smoothly, so that they could perform their combat role."[143] On the last day of the war, after the armistice on 11 November at 11:00 AM but before it was enforced, 2,738 men died and more than eight thousand were wounded on both sides.[144]

The Truth of War Revealed

The day after the war's final battle, Kahn sent letters to his sister and sister-in-law in Chicago, admitting his war-long deception. In these letters Kahn reveals fears that he had hidden from the family and admits that he had been lying about the degree of danger to which he had been

140 The brigade was equipped with the French G.P.F. Grande Portée Filloux, a long-range Filloux, and a trench mortar battery. The G.P.F. was invented by Lieutenant Colonel Filloux of the French Army. For more information see *G.P.F Book*.

141 Paul W. Grasmehr, reference coordinator, Pritzker Military Museum & Library, in email to author, 29 September 2017.

142 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Bessie Kahn, 12 November 1918.

143 Paul W. Grasmehr, reference coordinator, Pritzker Military Museum & Library, in email to author, 29 September 2017.

144 Hochschild, *To End All Wars*, 341.

exposed. These are the only letters where Kahn wrote of being in harm's way. Both letters speak to his patriotism and his belief in God. However, while similar in their descriptions of the action at the front, the letters differed in tone and emphasis. The letter to his sister, Ray, is personal and shows concern about their father. The letter to his sister-in-law, Bess, is poetic and literary; it demonstrates biblical knowledge by quoting a verse from Psalm 23. This is a repeat of the style of the letters Kahn sent on his arrival in France. By comparing the two letters, below, the reader gains additional insight into the nature of family relationships.

> Nov. 12, 1918 France
> Dear Sister Ray.
>
> It [is] all over now and thank God for that. Now is time enough to tell you the truth. I've told you all false hoods for such a long time that I feel that I must confess to the truth, now that I am alive, and we are victorious.
>
> Dear Sister, death stared me in the eyes a million times during the past 30-40 days. Life has been miserable and absolutely worthless, and each time I thought I was going I thought of the folks at home, and how my death would affect Dad. But God has been with me, and I am now about to relate the truth, and am happy to say that I did all that any American could do for his country. My work was very hard for me, because my 3rd battalion was in a sacrifice position ever since we came, but in spite of it all, we came through it fine.
>
> Our enemy put up a very strong counter attack (up to the last minute). At 10 a.m. yesterday our last casualty was a man struck by a mustard gas shell sent directly over our guns and closing the war.[145]

After telling his sister-in-law that much of what she read earlier was false, he wrote the following moving words:

> November 12, 1918:
> Dear Sister Bess:… During the past 41 days I've been directly in the shadow of death, and although many men have been lost here, have

145 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 12 November 1918. For a discussion of the effects of shells and shrapnel see Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders*, 569.

> given their bodies for a most noble cause, I am alive to-day, when Liberty rules the world, to repeat several of my sad adventures.
>
> Bess, when we came here, we were selected as a sacrifice battalion, separated from our regiment and placed directly behind the Infantry to guard them in the trenches. A position of this sort is never taken by heavy artillery of our sort, but owing to the nature of the offensive, we were placed in this embarrassment to our joy. Anything to save a dough boy. They deserve all the credit in the world, but regret to say, that the newly entitled to honors in this war are not alive to receive them. This portion of ours was a camouflage to our enemy because they could not realize why we should assume such positions … and to our good fortune the war ended just in time to spare the lives of those that remain to hear the news of Peace.[146]

According to Grasmehr, they might have felt like a sacrifice or "orphaned" battalion because they were separated from other American units and placed so close to the front.[147] As the war progressed, it was standard practice for battalions to be reassigned to other divisions with the American or Allied Armies.

Parts of Kahn's letters of 12 November are problematic, as they do not match battalion history. According to the official record, Kahn's battalion was near the battlefields for ten days and saw action for the last eight days of the war, not the thirty to forty days the letters recount.[148] What to make of the discrepancy? One possible explanation is that the letters were written the day after war's end, and it could have seemed as if they had been under fire for much longer. Also, the battalion had been away from their Beaumont billets for several weeks, including time at the artillery range. The letters are a reminder of the unreliability of war letters, even when the emotions ring true.

---

146 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Bessie Kahn, 12 November 1918.

147 Paul W. Grasmehr, reference coordinator, Pritzker Military Museum & Library, in email to author, 28 September 2017.

148 "The 303d FA Regiment left its training camp on 1 Nov. 1918. Enters combat operations on 2 Nov until 11 Nov. LT Kahn was not under fire for 41 days." Leonid Kondratiuk, director, Historical Services, The Adjutant General's Office, Massachusetts.

After admitting his falsehoods and telling his heroic tales, Kahn continued with a description of the army's plans for him for the coming weeks. But even in these letters, he remembers to end with something light and reassuring. To his sister he writes,

> Sister, I am going to get for now. We are leaving for Germany in 48 hours. We are only 10 miles from Metz and are going to hike this. From here I think we are going to Cologne in northern Germany to guard the border.
>
> From now on my work is going to be very light and pleasurable. I expect I might get a chance to go to London now and the Folks. I'll see Berlin for sure.
>
> Saving some of my troubles for a future time and wishing to thank you, Leah and all my dear relatives for keeping me happy with mail from home, I am
>
> Your loving brother
>
> Jacob

To his sister-in-law, he is less effusive, but still careful not to end with anything upsetting.

> Bess, must save some of the news for another time. All I wish to say is that within 48 hours will be on our way to Cologne in Northern Germany where we will station for about 6 months. We march to Metz (10 miles) then by train to destination my address remains unchanged. Keep on writing.

However, Kahn did not visit London or go to Germany. Instead, his brigade remained in France. A little more than two weeks after war's end, families in the United States and the members of the AEF overseas celebrated Thanksgiving. This year, all indulged. Kahn wrote from Varvinay:

> AEF France Nov. 28, 1918
>
> Dear Sister:
>
> To-day is Thanksgiving Day, and no doubt you are celebrating it as wonderfully as we are. I presume that we will have two of these Holidays in November hereafter the usual and the 11th day of the month. We are having a big time to-day. Eats—drinks and amusements—including contests and fireworks….

Trust you are all well, regards to everyone. Jacob[149]

A Sad and Slow Homecoming

Now that the war was over, Kahn's letters read like travelogues. Americans often spoke in awe of the age and historical significance of the buildings and churches—visited by Joan of Arc, kings, and other dignitaries from their history books—but also noted the lack of modernity of the people who used carts instead of wagons.[150] Because of these observations, Kahn was "really surprised when [he] saw real electric cars [in Nancy]." Like other American soldiers, he commented on women doing what had formerly been considered to be men's work.[151] A month after the armistice, Kahn wrote that all had not returned to pre-war status, as women remained in the male jobs of "motoring and conductors,"[152] something that was unusual for 1918. As members of the AEF spent more time away from army mess halls, they sought out and meticulously recorded the specifics of abundant and unfamiliar foods. French meals became a significant feature of letters and diaries. [153] To his sister, Kahn described his holiday, calling Nancy "a very beautiful city" and listing in mouthwatering detail his first French meal:

> I met two American nurses there and had a real honest dinner…. An experience so rare that I've almost forgotten how to act. I must tell you what I had to eat[:] one dozen oysters, Fillet de Sole with French salad dressing—1/4 spring chicken, French fried potatoes and some sort of puffed potatoes, steak and mushrooms—spinach cauliflowers—fresh peas—Vegetable Salad (everything from weeds to grass in it) Oranges—apples—nuts—Coffee, Champaign and Beer. It was the first time since my arrival overseas that I have seen so much food in one place at one time.[154]

149 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 28 November 1918. The army held a religious service and holiday dinner. *G.P.F. Book*, 27.

150 Ibid., 206–207.

151 See Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders*, 187.

152 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 17 December 1918.

153 Kennedy, *Over Here*, 209.

154 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 17 December 1918.

From the amount of food Kahn ordered, he must have been famished. Obviously not kosher, this is the first meal in which Kahn mentions seafood or meat. This could be because the army's meat was not worthy of a letter home. Bad cooking would have been only part of the problem; many American men reported weight loss, as the army's lack of preparedness affected the food supply line.[155] Ten days after the Nancy letter, Kahn wrote: "Am having the most wonderful trips, Enjoying every minute of the day and nights. I do absolutely no work and only travel via machine to enjoy all the surrounding country. I've seen France from one end to the other South-North East-West and feel satisfied that I can say with little exception that I've seen all of France."[156]

But as Kahn was finishing his wartime service and experiencing some well-deserved travel, unbeknownst to him his family back home was experiencing sadness and loss. Just as Kahn had shielded his family from knowledge that might distress them, they had been doing the same for him. In truth, his father in Chicago had been quite sick, and Kahn, unaware of this, became a carefree tourist. [157] It was during these travels that his father died. Kahn wrote to Ray on 28 December that he was disappointed that he had not received a letter from her recently but, as the battalion readied for the embarkation point, he was looking forward to seeing the entire family soon.[158] Ray, his constant correspondent, had not been able to bring herself to tell Kahn of their father's illness and death, so the task of informing him fell on his brother. On 29 December Kahn received a cablegram from his brother, Louis, with the devastating news that his father had died on 20 December.

Filled with sadness and guilt at not being there to assist his father in his final days, Kahn expressed impatience with the military for the long wait for a ship home:

---

155 Kennedy, *Over Here*, 209.

156 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 28 December 1918.

157 Kennedy, *Over Here*, 205.

158 "[The battalion has] turned in all guns-equipment and medical and surgical supplies and orders read that we move as soon as our material is accepted and signed over." Letter, Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 28 December 1918. Date confirmed in *G.P.F. Book*, 29.

I've been very, very grieved since I received Louis's cablegram about our sad, indeed very sad misfortune. But dear sister, our dear Dad did suffer so during the past months I am certain he suffered terribly and feel sure that God will provide for our dear Dad for all his good—his kindness, his charity and especially his love and care for his children….

I do wish I was home. I am heart stricken to think that any such thing could happen in my absence, especially with me so far away absolutely unable to come to my dear and beloved Father in his last hours….

Oh how I wish I was home. If I could only get there at once, I would be more able to appreciate what has happened…. [I] sit here like crazy trying to find a way to get home, and praying to God, to reward my dear Father for all his great traits and love for his Family.

Dear Sister write me about all that happened You never even wrote that Dad was worse….

Love to all. Jacob[159]

By 10 January the 151st Field Artillery Brigade arrived near the Bordeaux port, but they did not board the *Santa Rosa* for home until April. Kahn grew restless:

Jan. 19, 1919

Dear Sister Ray.

Just a few lines to let you know that I am feeling well and trust that you all are the same.

I am in no mood for writing letters … receiving the Sad news from home and Know you will pardon me. I am terribly anxious to get home. So anxious that if a boat does not come in soon I will go a.w.o.l. and swim or fly….

The embarkation officer informs me that he does not expect ship (passenger) in for 2–3 weeks yet, but that I am to sail on the first available transport.

With love to you all, and awaiting very impatiently and very anxiously to see you, I remain

Your loving brother

Jacob[160]

159 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 1 January 1919.

160 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 19 January 1919.

No longer needing to sound positive for his family, Kahn confided to his sister: "I feel that I have done my duty, and my bit; suffered my allowance and taken my share of risks, now I want to be relieved and get back to where life is worth while."[161]

As the wait for a ship home continued, the brigade received an inspection and review by General Pershing, himself. The 151st was deemed "one of the finest brigades he had ever inspected."[162] Kahn's unit also received honors from the French government; they presented the Lorraine campaign steamer to the 303rd Field Artillery Regiment for its support of French troops.

Kahn had been promised a ship home by January; however, this was not to be. Men became bored, and the YMCA and army organized activities, classes, and sporting events to entertain them. The army also staged mock battles, all to fight boredom and keep the men busy.[163] Most of these activities were designed for the troops, not doctors. Kahn continued to have nothing to do but wait.

After three months of delays, Kahn seemed resigned to the wait. The impatience of January, when he was overwhelmed with grief for his father and desperate to be with his family, had passed, and he had developed more empathy for his fellow soldiers. As he sat in the beautiful port city, he realized that other men might also have a pressing need to be home.

> March 29, 1919
> Dear Sister Ray.
>
> Something has come over me that inspires me to writing letters. It's the 1st time I've felt this way since Christmas time. What it is I cannot say, but I surely am feeling fine these past few days. Perhaps because we are on the western coast and only 25 feet from the ocean waters and may be not that but the thought of assuredness that my wish and desire for getting home is going to be a reality. A boat left today and took about 1000 men out of the country for N.Y. I was glad to see the boys go, for

161 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 17 December 1918.

162 *G.P.F. Book*, 29. Pershing inspected the brigade on 28 February 1919.

163 Kennedy, *Over Here*, 206.

> I'm certain that they are many amongst them that are as anxious to get home as I am. Being in a position as I am in here I think I can say that perhaps some of those poor fellows have even more urgent reasons for getting home than I and the Lord knows I have plenty.

But he was not always able to sustain that level of patience and empathy. His letter continued:

> Regardless of our own sorrows and domestic distress we are urged under circumstances to wait our turn which no doubt is perhaps a fair and good motto. Many of the men exaggerate their worries a great deal and many who have none claim to have an over abundance. Until conditions become so uncertain that even the honest man is not believed.

Still adjusting to the reality of his father's death, he was also concerned about what the future would hold for the family without his father at the head of the seder table.

> We were to sail on Jan 9th and we are still here. Wishing you are all in good health and a pleasant Pasach, although I know it will be saddest and most unpleasant "Seder" we have ever had, and I'm sure we will never be able to enjoy our "Seders" as we have here-to-fore-, I am Your loving brother Jacob
> Kiss all the children for me.[164]

Kahn did not state how he would observe the holiday. Beyond the holiday, the letter goes on to discuss his immediate concerns about where he, his mother, and his unmarried sister would live. Issues such as this not only affected the family, but where he would reestablish his medical practice. However, because he was overseas, other family members made decisions for him. His return home would be the beginning of his new role as family caregiver, without the assistance of his father, but for now he could only participate in matters at home via letters.

The 151st Field Artillery Brigade finally reached Boston on 25 April. Six months after the war's end, Kahn mustered out of his country's service and quickly headed home to reunite with his family and medical

164 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Ray Greenwald, 29 March 1919.

practice. He spent the rest of his professional life in his local South Chicago community as a respected doctor and a community pillar.[165] However, his overseas experiences had enlarged his world and expanded his interest in seeing other countries. When he left home for a world voyage in the 1920s, he sent home colorful letters from each exotic port.[166] Because of his WWI service, he journeyed as an experienced traveler and as an American patriot.

Conclusion

"Linked by Letters" describes the fragile communication between families worried at home and their loved ones in the military. Throughout the years, the yearning for mail is one of the most common themes in American war correspondence.[167] Kahn ended most of his letters with "keep on writing" or the subtler "my address remains."[168] Kahn's friend, Joe Lebowitz, also a doctor stationed in France, wrote to their common correspondent Bessie Kahn: "Letters are the most welcome things we eat in this part of the world. Things that are trivial at home are received here with great interest."[169] He ended the letter with a request for her to keep writing and to enlist her sisters to write as well. All who could hold a pen established another link to home.

Although every soldier had an individual story to tell and all faced different obstacles, their letters shared an universal theme. The quest for news of family and friends always remained urgent. For Kahn, his priorities did not change as the year progressed. Of prime importance was always the health and well-being of his family, especially his father. As time went on, Kahn also gained appreciation for his fellow soldiers;

165 "Reminisces About the Late Dr. Kahn," *Chicago Daily Calumet* (10 March 1959): 2.
166 Dr. Kahn traveled around the world with two other doctors. They joined the early-twentieth-century American tourist boom. Melissa R. Klapper, "The Great Adventure of 1929: The Impact of Travel Abroad on American Jewish Women's Identity" *American Jewish History* 102, no. 1 (January, 2018): 86.
167 Andrew Carroll, *War Letters: Extraordinary Correspondence from American Wars* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 35.
168 Letter from Jacob Kahn to Bessie Kahn, 12 November 1918.
169 Letter from Joe Lebowitz to Bessie Kahn, 27 July 1917.

this too was reflected in his letters. However, the main themes of his letters endured: his good health and safety, his family, patriotism, and his desire for further correspondence.[170]

An unanswered question is how the continuous correspondence with men overseas affected personal connections. Not only were family members evaluating and reevaluating what elements of their lives to share, but they were also constantly worrying about the safety of their soldiers. Although men as well as women were concerned about their family and friends in the military, gender may have played a role, as mothers, wives, and sisters especially sought assurances that all was well. [171] Family on both sides of the ocean needed assurance about the physical well-being of their loved ones, whether true or not. War letters, like all correspondence, reflected what the authors wanted their correspondents to know. They are not histories or even diaries, but writing meant to provide a link between a soldier and a child, wife, parent, sibling, or friend at home. The content of letters varied from correspondent to correspondent, but for the soldiers overseas and the family at home it was the act of receiving a letter that was important. Therefore, the power of a letter lay not in its contents but in its reassurance that the link remained intact.

For a historian, war letters play a different role. Soldiers' letters provide a layer of descriptions and emotions on the bare bones of military histories. Beyond dates and maps, letters can indicate feelings and practices, even if they contain unreliable information. As primary documents they must be questioned and placed in context. An author's divergence from the truth forces the historian to delve into other sources to confirm or reject content.

---

170 Lebowitz, Kahn's cousin, although also a doctor, arrived much earlier and worked in a large hospital rather than serving a mobile unit. Lebowitz's letters reflected his personality. Although they were written to the same family members back home, they were more conversational, discussed baseball and food from home, and expressed feelings freely. He told his brother, after the war ended, he could now read descriptive letters to their parents. These letters had been withheld from them so they would not worry. Letter from Joe Lebowitz to Abe Lebowitz, 17 November 1918. In posession of author.

171 Carroll, *War Letters*, 36.

What can we take away from these letters? A greater understanding of an American Jewish family's relationships, values, and practices. Family members were tested; all learned whom they could rely on. In Kahn's case, his letters revealed not truths, necessarily, but insights into the interworking of an American Jewish family during the pressure cooker of war. His letters demonstrate the love he had for his family. They also demonstrate what military life was like for a Jewish doctor: not as a war hero or an immigrant, but as an example of the emerging inclusion of Jews into American life.

Kahn's letters never spoke of antisemitism—no ethnic slur or religious discrimination he encountered in the military. It's questionable, however, whether that's an accurate portrayal.[172] If he did encounter such prejudice, one reason for not writing about it might be to protect his family from that knowledge. It is also possible that he suspected sharing such experiences would be frowned upon; although war letters discussed private matters, everyone was aware that military censors could scrutinize their correspondence. Kahn's Judaism was not a secret; he accepted furloughs for the High Holidays. But his educated class and native birth may have separated him from some of the discrimination that affected many non-English-speaking immigrants in the AEF.[173] His ethnicity was not necessarily assumed, and he identified with the officers and other professionals.[174]

Serving in the military helped define what it meant to be an American Jew. It reinforced patriotism and forced companionship with men beyond their neighborhoods and in turn educated others about American Jews. Historian Christopher M. Sterba summed it up: "Service overseas was a point of honor for most [ethnic Americans] and bound them

172 As noted earlier, Kahn was never promoted. It is possible that this was due to antisemitism; however, Kahn knew Jewish doctors who became captains.

173 Jewish soldiers could face both verbal and physical abuse. The army was a segment of American society that still exhibited racism and ethnocentrism. Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders*, 235–238. Lieutenant Jacob Marcus believed that antisemitism existed "at all times and under all circumstances." Laskin, *Long Way Home*, 150. Also see Slotkin, *Lost Battalions*, 104–105.

174 For a discussion of officers in the AEF see Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders*, 260–280.

closer to their homes in America than ever before."[175] For Kahn, being a patriotic American and a Jew went hand in hand.

The Jewish Welfare Board (JWB) also held this belief. The JWB worked to place Judaism on equal footing with other major American religions.[176] For them, "American values demanded, and good citizenship required, the free expression of religious differences among men."[177] During World War I, the JWB set a new standard of inclusion for the American military.[178] General Pershing also recognized the service of American Jews. He wrote: "When the time came to serve their country under arms … no class of people served with more patriotism or with higher motives than the young Jews who volunteered or were drafted and went overseas with our other young Americans to fight the enemy."[179] As Jessica Cooperman concluded, the military in World War I laid the groundwork for religious pluralism in American life; this type of pluralism developed more universally in the 1940s and 1950s.[180]

Many American Jewish soldiers experienced World War I as transnationals. They might have been born in the United States; however, like immigrant soldiers, they had strong ties to relatives in Europe and elsewhere. Kahn had multiple overlapping identities. He was at once an American soldier, the child of European Jews, and a part of the wider Jewish Diaspora. He felt a kinship with the French Jews with whom he spent the Jewish holidays; at the same time, he developed respect for the officers and doughboys with whom he served. In this way, Kahn exemplified the idea of being both an American patriot and an American Jew.

Shortly after the war ended Raymond Fosdick, chairman of the U.S. War Department's Commission on Training Camp Activities, exclaimed

175 Sterba, *Good Americans*, 176.

176 Under the auspices of the Commission on Training Camp Activities, they established themselves in many military camps in the United States and France and provided Jewish chaplains, prayer books, and holiday services.

177 Cooperman, "Jewish Welfare Board," 261.

178 Ibid.

179 Laskin, *Long Way Home*, 332.

180 Cooperman, "Jewish Welfare Board," 261.

to the members of the Jewish War Board that in the military camps, "The fences have disappeared; the sectarian lines have vanished." [181] While that may have been the case in some activities, this was a little too optimistic for American society in general. The postwar decades produced the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan, the Red Scare, and immigration restrictions. Patriotism after the war took on layers of complexity. During the 1920s Congress passed immigration quotas that effectively blocked Jewish immigration from Europe to the United States.[182] This made it difficult, if not impossible, for more of Kahn's extended family to unite in Chicago. Like many others, Kahn's parents would have been unwelcome in the United States after 1924.

The immigration legislation was just one of several examples of nativism and xenophobia that greeted Kahn and other veterans in the postwar years. Even though all met and worked with men from many nationalities and religious affiliations,[183] the war did not conquer all discrimination.[184] Jewish war veterans believed that they had earned the right to insist on equal treatment for Jews. A Jewish War Veteran flier read, "As American defenders, we feel we are privileged and can demand that the Jew be not discriminated against, and shall have his rightful place in the sun."[185] This was not always the case.

The end of World War I was a watershed moment that reverberated long after the armistice was reached. To Kahn and other veterans, 11 November became a holy day.[186] Just as he always stopped to picnic on the Fourth of July, on 11 November at 11:00 AM, Kahn always stopped to call his niece, Leah, his teenage correspondent. He started the tradition at the armistice in 1918 and continued it until his death in 1959. According to Leah's daughter, Kahn even managed to call his niece on

181 Ibid., 237.

182 For a discussion of The Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and the Immigration Act of 1924 see Laskin, *Long Way Home*, 333–334.

183 Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders*, 238, 407–409.

184 Ibid., 239; Laskin, *Long Way Home*, 333–334.

185 Sterba, *Good Americans*, 209.

186 The son of a Jewish veteran remembered that "November 11 was like Yom Kipper —always an important day." Laskin, *Long Way Home*, 331.

11/11 from France.[187] For Lieutenant Jacob V. Kahn, patriotism and family remained always intertwined.

Ava F. Kahn holds a Ph.D. in history from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her publications include Jewish Voices of the California Gold Rush: A Documentary History, 1849–1880*;* Jewish Life in the American West: Immigration, Settlement and Community*;* Jews of the Pacific Coast: Reinventing Community on America's Edge *co-authored with Ellen Eisenberg and William Toll;* California Jews *co-edited with Marc Dollinger; and* Transnational Traditions: New Perspectives on American Jewish History *co-edited with Adam Mendelsohn. Kahn taught at UC Davis and SFSU, served as a research associate at the Western Jewish History Center of the Magnes Museum and as a visiting scholar at the California Studies Center, University of California, Berkeley.*

187 Dorothy Kay Schwartz, email to author, 28 February 2018. Kahn donated his body to the University of Southern California medical school.