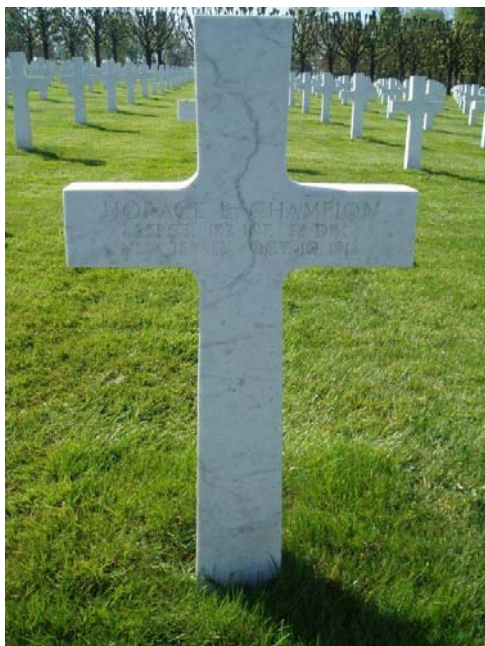


## Taps for a Jerseyman

At American war cemeteries throughout the world, the end of each day is marked by the playing of “Taps”, a bugle call that can be likened in its purpose to the British “Last Post” or “Sunset”. This occurs at the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery at Romagne sur Montfauçon, some 30 miles to the northwest of the French fortress city of Verdun, and although it may seem incongruous if one has not been there, the live bugler has long since been replaced by a recording, with loudspeakers strategically concealed in trees and other vantage points. Yet, the melancholy notes effectively carry across the white headstones of more than 14,000 American Great War dead, and they are a fitting daily tribute to these men who came to serve in France from every state of the United States of America.



And from Jersey too! For, in Block D, Row 25, Grave 25, there is one Sergeant Horace Robert Champion who served with the 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment that formed part of the 32<sup>nd</sup> US Division. He was killed in action on the 10<sup>th</sup> October, 1918 when his Regiment fought to take the strategic Heights of Romagne, during the fierce battles that faced the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) in the months before Armistice and the cessation of hostilities. His entry in the American Battlefield Monuments Commission database records that he was from New Jersey.



But, during research of the early-1919 issues of the Jersey Evening Post (JEP) a reference to his death was discovered, along with a comment from his grieving Jersey family that he had been in the US for some six years.

Horace Robert, or Robert Horace according to the parish of St Helier’s Baptism Records, was born on the 15<sup>th</sup> October, 1891 to William Stephen Champion and Louisa Jane Champion (née de la Haye) who lived at 37 Town Mills, his father having been a coal merchant.

Yet, there is a small twist in the tale with the discovery of a Jersey-born Able-Bodied Seaman Robert Horace Champion in the Royal Navy service records at Kew.

These records show that, having been employed in civilian life in Jersey as a baker, Horace had joined the RN as a Boy, 2<sup>nd</sup> Class on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1907, stating his year of birth as the 15<sup>th</sup> October, 1890, given the service number 239759, and committing to serve until his “30<sup>th</sup> birthday” in 1920. However, it was revealed in his naval record, that he never reached that date, since on 5<sup>th</sup> August, 1912 he was reported as having gone “on the run” from the RN while serving aboard the cruiser HMS Venus. The act of going “on the run” (it equates with the Army’s Absence without Leave (AWOL)) appears to have been out of character even though he had “enjoyed” a 14 day stay in the cells whilst previously serving on HMS Duncan, a pre-Dreadnought battleship. He had a few days start on the Navy, with HMS Venus anchored in Stokes Bay off Portsmouth, having gone on leave with the rest of the Port Watch on the 30<sup>th</sup> July until the 5<sup>th</sup> August. It would have certainly been easy to find a ship bound for the USA or some other foreign port leaving Southampton at that time, while HMS Venus would weigh anchor in the early hours of the 6<sup>th</sup> August to head northwards to the Firth of Forth. This was obviously consistent with the subsequent statement from the family in 1919.

Although enquiries were put into train via the JEP, nothing initially emerged from Jersey, although a relative was found who sadly could offer nothing further. Similarly, an enquiry to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in St Louis, MO eventually came back with a quote of \$60 to copy his papers! Unfortunately, it was “buying a pig in a poke” as the number of pages was not identified, and the Archive had suffered in a fire in 1973, so that his record needed to be chemically treated first! The price tag was fundamentally more than the author was prepared to pay.



But, it was then discovered that the JEP is seen far and wide, for, contact was made by a gentleman in Camden, New Jersey, who had picked up on the enquiry, as he is looking into the Great War dead from that city. Horace is one of those men! As a result, images were received of an index card recording some of Horace’s details which are listed below:

Dates	Event
5 <sup>th</sup> January, 1916	Enlisted at Fort Slocum, NY
5 <sup>th</sup> January, 1916	To 'I' Coy, 17 Inf Regt
23 <sup>rd</sup> February, 1916	Promoted Corporal
7 <sup>th</sup> April, 1917	Promoted Sergeant
1 <sup>st</sup> August, 1917	Promoted Sup(ervisory?) Sergeant
17 <sup>th</sup> August, 1917	Reverted to Sergeant
21 <sup>st</sup> August, 1917	To 1 Coy, 1 Inf Trg Bn
12 <sup>th</sup> January, 1918	To France (Departure from USA?)
27 <sup>th</sup> March, 1918	To 10 Coy, 1 Inf Trg Regt
1 <sup>st</sup> May, 1918	Promoted First Sergeant
31 <sup>st</sup> August, 1918	To 'M' Coy, 161 Inf Regt
8 <sup>th</sup> September, 1918	Reverted to Sergeant
8 <sup>th</sup> September, 1918	To 'D' Coy, 127 Inf Regt
10 <sup>th</sup> October, 1918	Killed in Action at Romagne

Horace's enlistment in the US Army took place fifteen months before the entry of the United States into the Great War, and the contact in New Jersey subsequently advised that the 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, of which Horace was a member on joining the US Army, had been part of the US' Mexican (or Punitive) Expedition sent to deal with Pancho Villa after his Columbus raid in March, 1916. Commanded by General (Black Jack) John Pershing, the Expedition was unsuccessful, and the US forces returned as involvement in the Great War was imminent.

However subsequently, another piece of information was provided by a gentleman in Jersey. Having seen the JEP item, he had spotted Horace's name in Jersey's property transaction database. It appears that when Horace's father died in 1914, the estate was shared between Horace and his siblings, and in Horace's case, he became the recipient of the "Cottage au Milieu" on Bagatelle Lane in St Saviour. However, Horace was not in Jersey to parade before the Bailiff at the Royal Court, instead, he was to be found in the west Texas town of El Paso (and probably in Rosa's Cantina!) for, on the 29<sup>th</sup> December, 1914, he had visited an Attorney to attest as to his identity! Subsequently after news of his death reached Jersey in 1919, the cottage was very quickly sold with Horace's eldest brother receiving the money.

It is unclear whether Horace had made a will on enlisting in the US Army, and if it was made available, whether the sale of the cottage was in accord with that will, and whether the proceeds went to the right person! Perhaps those NARA records should have been ordered, if so, 'are there any buddies out there who could spare a dime?'

Even with just these few scraps of information, it does appear that Horace Champion's brief military career was unusual, if not almost unique, for a Briton. Given that he had become a man of property, one may also wonder what his post-war plans were? A triumphant return to Jersey perhaps? If so, would the Navy have still wanted their pound of flesh? Sadly, for him and for us, we shall never know.

Readers may want to get the book: "To Conquer Hell" by Edward G Lengel which looks at the American Meuse-Argonne campaign in the last few months of the Great War. Well written, it is a surprisingly good "warts and all" account of the AEF's struggles, and has a set of very clear maps.





**An Overview of the AEF Campaign  
(From the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery Memorial)**

Champion, Horace R;

246,247

\*White \*Colored

Residence: Camden, N.J.

\*Enlisted \*R. A. \*No. ~~Co~~ \*E. B. \*C. \*Inducted at Ft. Slocum on Jan 5 1916

Place of birth: St. Heliers Jersey, England Age of date of birth: 24 2/12 yrs

Organizations served in, with dates of assignments and transfers: Co I 17 Inf Jan 5/16

to Aug 21/17; 1 Co 1 Inf Tng Bn to Mar 27/18; 10 Co

1 Inf Tng Regt to Aug 31/18; Co M 161 Inf to (over)

Grades, with date of appointment: Pvt Jan 5/16; Corp Feb 23/16; Sgt

Apr 7/17; Sup Sgt Aug 1/17; Sgt Aug 17/17; 1st Sgt

May 1/18; Sgt Sept 8/18

Engagements: Verdun

Served overseas from 1/12/18 to 10/10/18 from to

\*Killed in action \*Date of Oct 10/18

Other wounds or injuries received in action:

Persons notified of death: Mrs. Louise Champion, Mother,

7 Vauxharve St., St. Heliers Jersey, England.

Remarks:

\*Strike out words not applicable.

†Dates of departure from and arrival in the U. S.

Sept 8/18; Co D 127 Inf to Oct 10/18.

Horace R Champion's Index Card  
(It is thought that Vauxharve St is actually Vauxhall Street)

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