

An Oftebro serving as American soldier in WWI.

3-8-2 Oddleif Oftebro, born 29.11.1894, grew up in Kristiansand, Norway, as the eldest son of school teacher and later school manager in the city, Ole Mathias Oftebro. Oddleif was musically gifted and developed into an accomplished violinist. The family had strong ties to their relatives in America, where his aunt Anna Tonette Johnson and her family were farming in Nebraska. In 1908 Anna Tonette and her two daughters visited Norway. Under their stay in Norway the Oftebro family in Kristiansand was a firm anchor for the visiting Americans, and family ties were further strengthened.



Young Oddleif Oftebro plays his violin in the family circle in Kristiansand in 1908. Aunt Anna (3-4 Anna Tonette Johnson) (in dark dress) is visiting from America with her two daughters, Sarah and Gudrun. Picture from 3-8-4-3 Liv Ingjerd Oftebro Vogt's photo collection.



In 1912 Oddleif, now 18 years old, decided to go to America. On 17th April of that year he entered the “America-boat” in Kristiansand. From now on, Aunt Anna and her family, who had now moved to Chicago, were his firm grounding in his new homeland. Oddleif developed further his music interests and skills in America, and he joined an orchestra in Chicago as a violinist.

Caption:

From Oddleif's happy young days. Picture from Liv Ingjerd Oftebro Vogt's photo collection.

In Europe, the First World War raged from the year 1914. From a starting point where Germany and Austria-Hungary stood against the big powers Britain, France and Russia, a wide range of nations on several continents came to oppose



In 1917 Oddleif volunteered for war service for the American forces. Picture from 3-4-1-1-3 Rick Oftebro Hollinbeck jr.'s photo collection.

11th November 1918 he is still at the front in France. This day Corporal Oddleif Oftebro writes from Comp. B, 56 engineers, 12th platoon, Am. E.F. to aunt Anna in America about the gun-thunder that stopped 11.11 at 11 hours, as the order had been given. He does not mention his own health, but instead he is concerned with “this awful disease that takes away so many lives”. Oddleif obviously refers to the great influenza pandemic the “Spanish Flu”, which ravaged the world that year.

But his own health has got a serious blow. Like so many other soldiers, who have been exposed to gas attacks in the war, also Oddleif now experiences pulmonary

the formers. In 1917 also the United States entered the conflict that was to be the biggest disaster of war that the world had ever seen. More than 8.5 million soldiers were killed, and more than 21 million soldiers were registered as wounded. In addition there were unknown numbers of civilian victims.

When America announced participation in the war, Oddleif volunteered for military service for the American forces. His service was as a medic on the Western Front. It appears from his U.S. war medal (see photo) that his military service included participation in the great battle of Saint-Mihiel and in the final, major battle of Meuse-Argonne.

Among all the modern weapons which were now introduced into modern warfare, and used on these battlefields, mustard gas was the most dreaded. The gas, which was distributed in liquid form, evaporates slowly, depending on air temperature. Mustard gas is heavier than air, and concentrates particularly in the hollows in the terrain, such as in trenches. It sticks to the environment, equipment, clothing, etc., and has a terrible corrosive effect on the skin, but also on the lungs when it is inhaled. Gas attacks should now be Oddleif's fate at the front. Under the Medics Corps' operations in the front lines to bring out the wounded and the fallen, the medics were affected by the mustard gas, and Oddleif suffered serious damage to his lungs. The war

had now come to an end, however. On



Oddleif in the field. Picture from Liv Ingjerd Oftebro Vogt's photo collection.



Oddleif Oftebro after his return to Chicago when the war was over. Picture from Rick O. Hollinbeck jr.'s photo collection.

veterans attended movies, learned occupational skills, and chatted with volunteers from Ashville, who brought candy and cheer.”

The Catholic organization for men, "Knights of Columbus" seems to have been active in welfare work to the sick veterans. Back in America Oddleif got a prolonged stay just in the U.S. Army General Hospital no.19. His condition seemed to improve; he was optimistic and took on studies to become a dentist. On 22th September 1921 he wrote to Aunt Anna (on writing paper provided with a letter head of the "Knights of Columbus" by the way) that he is feeling better day by day. He is also excited by being able to tell her about his religious revival.

But Oddleif had unfortunately not regained health. Instead his condition became steadily worse. He had to give up his dental studies, and in 1926, terminally ill from tuberculosis, he returned to Norway and his parents with an American war pension, or war indemnity.

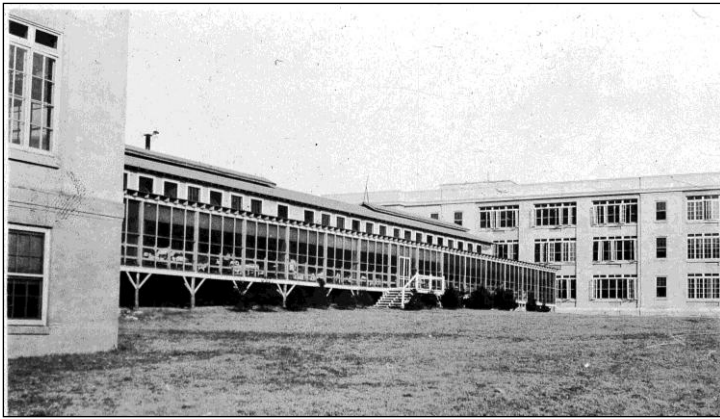
tuberculosis. This should hardly surprise anyone when we consider the cramped quarters, the tribulations and the poor hygienic conditions the soldiers had to endure at the front. The danger of infection was clearly reinforced by these conditions and the physical damage to the lungs that mustard gas had caused. The situation for many of those eventually discharged American soldiers was indeed so severe that one established in America special tuberculosis sanatoriums for them. Such a sanatorium was U.S. Army General Hospital No. 19 in Oteen, North Carolina.

In his article on this hospital, Rob Neufeld made the following account: "The other day I walked up Hemorrhage Hill in Oteen. World War I soldiers, afflicted with tuberculosis, had walked that path to the ambulatory wards of General Hospital no. 19 between 1918 and 1920. According to legend, if they made it to the top without giving the place name any credence, they were cured.” And further: "Unlike Karl Von Ruck's Winyah Sanitarium in Ashville, the Army did not use serums and vaccines. Rest, fresh air, frequent linen changes, and ample food were the cure. The need for good food motivated the camp specialist, Col. William Leyster, to get the daily per capita food ration increased from the standard 64 cents to one dollar. The



**Oddleif received the American “World War I Victory Medal” for his military service. On the three bars of the medal is written:
St. Mihiel
Meuse-Argonne
Defensive Sector**

The medal is today owned by 3-8-3-1 Nils Ole Oftebro. Photo: Nils Ole Oftebro.



For this war damage compensation he bought the property "Heirelunden" at rural Torridal outside Kristiansand for himself and his parents. Here Oddleif arranged his own personal room in the attic, where he spent his last months under his parents' warm care. He died 32 years old on 28th November 1926, and was buried at Kristiansand.

**In this sanatorium in Oteen, North Carolina Oddleif was hospitalized for 3 ½ years.
Picture from Rick Oftebro Hollinbeck's photo collection.**



**Oddleif Oftebro's grave at the cemetery in Kristiansand, Norway.
Picture from Rick Oftebro Hollinbeck jr.'s photo collection.**



His closest family was strongly affected by the loss of Oddleif. It may in that context be of interest to note that while Oddleif had to give up his dental studies in America, his younger brother Arnulf met his big brother's dream by leaving his teaching profession for the benefit of dental studies and a dental career in Norway. His sister Torbjørg called her son Oddleif to honor her brother, and Liv Ingjerd Oftebro Vogt protects carefully the necklace her mother Aslaug Oftebro got from her brother when he returned home from America, mortally ill.

**Necklace that Oddleif Oftebro brought with him to his sister Aslaug at his return from America in 1926. The necklace is currently owned by Aslaug's daughter, Liv Ingjerd Oftebro Vogt.
Photo: (3-6-2-4) Grethe Oftebro**