

HARRY COVENTRY

FEBRUARY 6, 1926.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House and ordered to be printed

Mr. REECE, from the Committee on Military Affairs, submitted the following

REPORT

[To accompany H. R. 658]

The Committee on Military Affairs, to which was referred the bill (H. R. 658) for the relief of Harry Coventry, having considered the same report favorably thereon with the recommendation that it do pass with the following amendment:

Line 9, strike out the period and add "on March 3, 1920: *Provided*, That no back pay, pension, or allowances shall be held to have accrued prior to the passage of this act."

The purpose of this bill is to confer the rights, privileges, and benefits now enjoyed by all honorably discharged soldiers of the World War on Harry Coventry who served as first sergeant in Company I, Three hundred and twenty-sixth United States Infantry.

In response to the committee's request for a report on the bill the Secretary of War submitted, in part, the following from The Adjutant General of the Army:

The records of this office show that Harry Coventry, Army Serial No. 1902387, enlisted in the military service of the United States October 5, 1917, at Philadelphia, Pa.; was assigned to the Ninth Company, Third Training Battalion, One hundred and fifty-fourth Depot Brigade; was transferred to Company I, Three hundred and twenty-sixth Infantry, October 20, 1917; left the United States for France April 29, 1918; served in the Toul and Marbache sectors; participated in the St. Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne offensives; was wounded in action by shrapnel October 17, 1918; was granted absence with leave from his organization February 4, 1919; and because of failure to return upon expiration of authorized leave was dropped as a deserter from the rolls of his organization March 8, 1919.

For the military offense referred to herein the above-named soldier was tried by a general court-martial which convened at Paris, France, * * * for violation of the sixty-first article of war, and sentenced to be dishonorably discharged from the service, to forfeit all pay and allowance due or to become due, and to be confined at hard labor, at such place as the reviewing authority may direct, for one year.

The sentence was approved but the period of confinement was reduced to six months.

This soldier arrived in the United States, a prisoner, from France November 25, 1919, and in accordance with the above sentence was released from confinement and dishonorably discharged March 3, 1920, at Prison Guard Company, Camp Dix, N. J.

In General Orders, No. 1, headquarters Eighty-second Division, American Expeditionary Forces, France, dated January 13, 1919, First Sergeant Coventry was cited for gallantry in action, on account of which he has been awarded the distinguished-service medal, as follows:

During the operation in the vicinity of St. Juvin, France, October 11-27, 1918, after all the officers of his company had either been killed or wounded, Sergeant Coventry assumed command of the company, and by his coolness, good judgment, and devotion to duty he successfully led it against the enemy and to the company objective, and although himself wounded in the leg, on October 18, 1918, he refused to be evacuated, but remained with the company until it was relieved.

In ordering this citation the commanding general took particular pride in announcing to the command the "fine example of courage and self-sacrifice" exhibited by Sergeant Coventry and in stating that "such deeds are evidence of that spirit of heroism which is innate in the highest type of the American soldier and responds unflinchingly to the call of duty, wherever or whenever it may come."

In a letter dated May 20, 1921, The Adjutant General of the Army informed the proponent of the bill as follows:

As the sentence of the court-martial in the case of this soldier was duly confirmed and carried into execution, it is beyond the power of any executive officer of the Government, the President included, to revoke, modify, or set the sentence aside, it being a well-established principle of law that there can be no revocation or modification of the sentence of a general court-martial that has been lawfully carried into execution, no matter how unjust or unmerited the sentence may be deemed to have been.

In explanation of his violation of the sixty-first article of war on the occasion referred to, Sergeant Coventry has submitted to the committee the following affidavit:

Harry Coventry, being duly sworn according to law, doth depose and say that he resides at 4713 Worth Street, city of Philadelphia, State of Pennsylvania; that he enlisted in the United States Army October 5, 1917, and served in Company I, Three hundred and twenty-sixth Infantry, in the St. Mihiel, Meuse, and Argonne offensives from May 8, 1918, to February 3, 1919, and that he was wounded three times and gassed twice in these offensives; that he received the distinguished-service cross, No. 4795, as first sergeant, and was granted a leave of absence February 3, 1919, for a period of 14 days, being due back to his command on February 17, 1919; that when his furlough was received the railroads were on strike in England and at the expiration of furlough, he being in Neston, England, was unable to report to his company; that he notified his commanding officer by telegram and failed to receive a reply; that he then notified Washington and in the meantime was taken sick from the effects of gas and wounds received in action; that he was then taken to the Alderhay Hospital, Liverpool, and that the hospital has record of his being there; that when discharged from the hospital he went to Rock Ferry, England, where his wife and child were living, and inquired as to whether or not he had received any mail pertaining to where he should report for duty; that he was informed none had been received; that he was arrested in Rock Ferry 10 days after his discharge from Alderhay Hospital and taken to Paris for trial; that he was tried by general court-martial under the sixty-first article of war, A. W. O. L., and under advice of counsel, although protesting against doing so, pleaded guilty; that he was sentenced to one year at hard labor, which was later reduced to six months; that he served this time

and at the expiration was dishonorably discharged from the United States Army; that since his discharge from the United States Army he has been taken sick twice from the effects of being gassed and has lost two positions on account of ill health; that at the time of his enlistment he was married and had one child.

HARRY COVENTRY.

Sworn and subscribed to before me this 26th day of September, 1921, A. D.

[SEAL.]

HARRY J. CLIFTON,
Notary Public, Philadelphia, Pa.

Commission expires March 16, 1925.

While Sergeant Coventry was in confinement at Camp Dix, and prior to his dishonorable discharge there on March 3, 1920, Lieut. Col. Homer Watkins, Three hundred and twenty-sixth Infantry, who was Sergeant Coventry's battalion commander in France, addressed the following letter to the commanding general at Camp Dix:

CEDARTOWN, GA., February 9, 1920.

From: Homer Watkins,
To: Commanding general, Camp Dix, N. J.
Subject: Prisoner Harry Coventry.

1. Harry Coventry, now in confinement at Camp Dix, served as first sergeant in my battalion in France during all the offensives of the battalion from June 26 to October 30, 1918. His services were highly creditable at all times. He was one of the bravest soldiers in the battalion and had perfect control over his company at all times. During the last 10 days in the line, he commanded his company, and he did it so well that at no time did I think it necessary to call for an officer to relieve him.

2. After all the fighting was over and the battalion was in the back area drilling and maneuvering and preparing for any emergency that might arise, a liberal style of leave was inaugurated. Taking advantage of this opportunity, Sergeant Coventry was granted the 14 days leave to visit his wife and children, either in England or Ireland. He failed to return and, of course, in due time was dropped from the rolls of his company as a deserter.

3. For whatever it is worth, I desire to state that the services of Sergeant Coventry were of such a character and his usefulness in the great cause in which the American Army was then fighting was so great, that he is entitled to any leniency and mercy which can be consistently, with the regulations, shown him. I would also appeal in behalf of his wife and children, the innocent sufferers of his lapse of duty and loyalty. Of all the enlisted men in my battalion, I think Sergeant Coventry stood at the top as a useful, efficient, and courageous soldier. But for his serious want of education he would have been sent to a training camp for officers almost at the beginning of his military career. I bespeak for him the greatest degree of clemency not unmingled with mercy.

HOMER WATKINS,

Late Lieutenant Colonel Three hundred and twenty-sixth Infantry.



