

# Two-Gun Cohen; Chinese Spy Master and a second Moishe!

BY JOE KING

Morris “Two-Gun” Cohen was the one and only Jewish Chinese General and, for a time, was head of the Chinese Secret Service! One of his colleagues was Dr. Moses Schwarzberg, a Russian Jew who helped save China, for a time, from the Communists.

The official languages (in order of importance) in the Chinese Secret Service, during the time of the Two Moishes, were Chinese, Yiddish and English.

Born in Poland to a large (eight children) observant Jewish family, Abraham Morris Cohen was a handful almost from the time he could walk. His father beat him when he was three years old for wandering away from his East London home. A sturdy lad, he responded to Christian boys’ bantering by – at age eight – knocking out a 12-year-old. A boxing promoter signed him to fight professionally. He called himself “Fat Moisha” or “Cockney Cohen,” but would never enter the ring on a Friday – the Jewish Sabbath. He feared his father’s wrath.



*1890's London with widespread poverty  
at a time when Jack the Ripper spread terror.*

He was often hungry; his family was poor – so he earned pocket change by picking pockets. Ultimately, he was recruited by a man known as “Harry the Gonof” (the Yiddish word for “thief” – a Fagen-like creature right out of a Charles Dickens novel. ) Arrested, he was sent, at age 12, to a variety of reform schools. His angry parents borrowed the money and sent him, aged 16, to a friend farming in Wappala, then in the Assiniboia territory – later part of Saskatchewan.

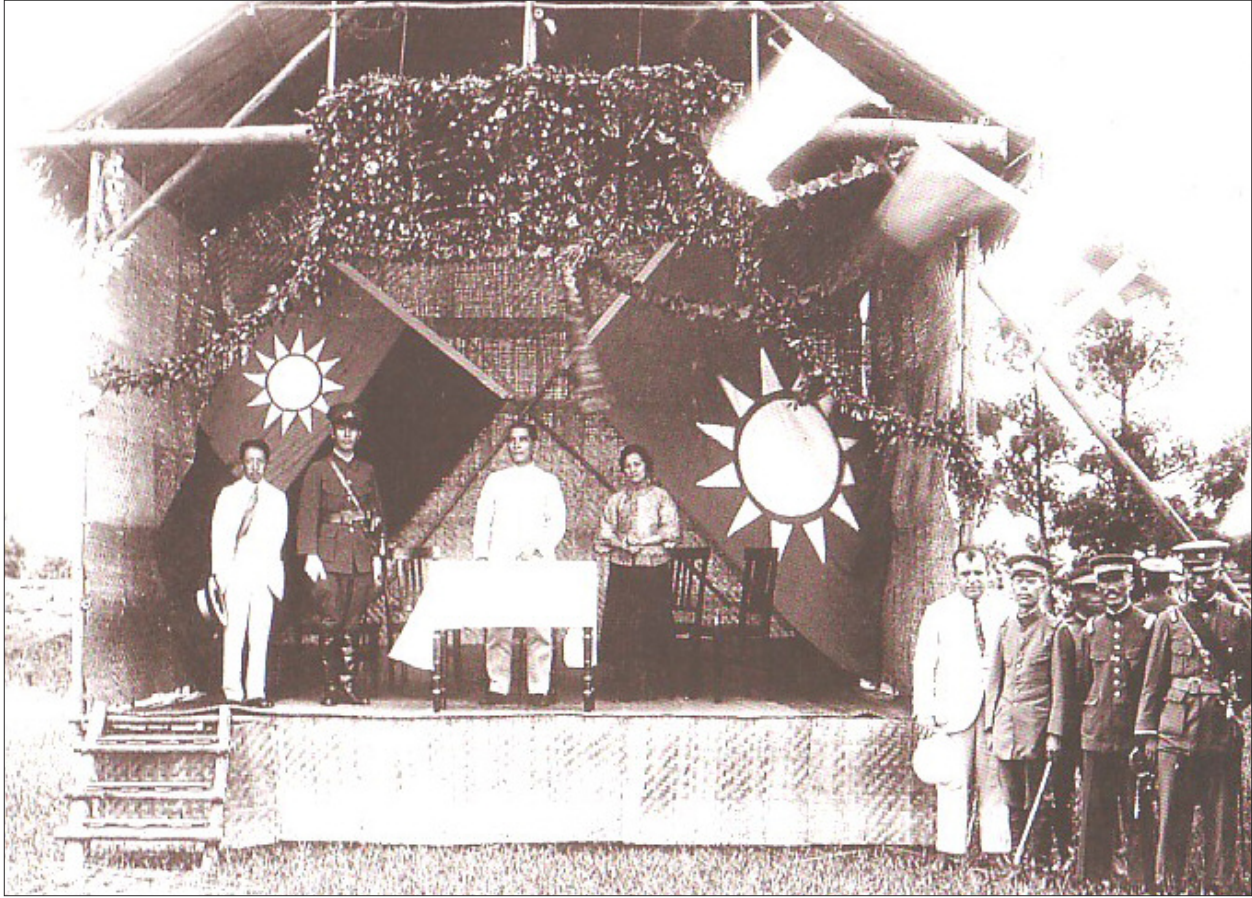


*Morris Cohen in a Canadian regiment during World War One*

Cohen’s life changed drastically one evening in Saskatoon. He delighted, on Sunday evenings, to dig into a large Chinese dinner and then gamble in the back of the café. But, when he turned up one night at one of his favorite haunts, he found the aged Chinese restaurant owner, Mah Sam, being held up by a hoodlum. Cohen wasn’t going to have his plans for the evening interrupted – so he sidled up to the thug, whacked him in the head – disarmed him – and then threw him bodily out of the restaurant.

To the Chinese, he became a hero at a time when anti-Asiatic feeling in Canada was even greater than its anti-Semitism. Cohen became the only white man admitted to the ranks of the secret Chinese Tong.

Ultimately, Morris Cohen journeyed to China – now being led into modernity by Dr. Sun Yat Sen, and he became commander of the President’s 250-man bodyguard.



*Morris Cohen, at the right in the white suit, with Chinese President Sun Yat-Sen and future President Chiang Kai-Shek.*

Several attempts were made to assassinate the President. On one occasion, Cohen fought off three assailants attacking Sun on a train. He was nicked in his left hand. The wound made him think. "Supposing it had been my right arm. As soon as we got back to Canton, I got me a second gun, another Smith and Wesson revolver."

Journalists dubbed him "Two-Gun" Cohen.

Two-Gun was of great service to the Chinese. A veteran of World War I, he taught his new friends boxing and the use of weapons. He became a military adviser, and an arms dealer. In 1922, he was named Director of the Chinese secret service.

Morris Cohen had a very limited knowledge of Chinese, but in his new post, he was able to use Yiddish quite a bit. One of his confreres was interpreter Moishe Schwarzberg, and the two would chat in Yiddish!

The Schwarzberg story is stunning in itself.

At the beginning of the 1920s, Moses Schwartzberg was fleeing the newly-born Soviet Union. He had been a member of a revolutionary group at the University of Moscow, whose members, were marked for death after they tried to kill Soviet Union founder Lenin in 1918 (a plot devised by yet another Jew, Shlomo ben Hirsch Rozenblum – known to the British Secret Service as Sidney Reilly – and whose career was fictionalized as James Bond. But that’s another story.)

Schwartzberg’s flight took him to Siberia, then a lawless region. As he crossed over the border into China, then locked into a Civil War between a democratic party headed by Sun Yat-Sen and a swath of powerful war lords, he stumbled across the near-frozen body of an elderly Chinese man. The man still had a faint pulse, and Schwartzberg dragged him to a nearby Russian Cossack village, and brought him back to consciousness. To the Jewish doctor’s surprise, the Chinese man spoke Russian and after a time, feeling that he was dying, he turned over to Schwartzberg a message from the Soviet Union’s leaders to Dr. Sun (plus gold coins to bribe his way).



*The people of the border area between Siberia and China*

The doctor made his way to Shanghai but found his way to the President barred by a highly-protective bodyguard. Schwartzberg gathered that the “huge man with a shaved head and two pistols in his belt” was in charge but when he tried pleading his case, in Chinese and Russian, the chief bodyguard responded, in English, “Who the hell are you and what the hell do you want?”

When he learned who he was, Cohen switched to Yiddish. A collaboration of the two Moishes was born. When Scharzberg made his presentation to Doctor Sun, it became apparent that the Chinese President couldn't read Russian. The multilingual Jewish doctor was immediately offered a job as an interpreter. Two-Gun put it this way: “Listen, kid, how would you like to stay on as Dr. Sun's confidential secretary. He likes you.” And so Chinese spies worked in Chinese, Yiddish and English!

(Dr. Schwartzberg completed his medical degree in Berlin, practiced medicine in Hong Kong and Peking, but fled with his wife and daughter to Chungking when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour in 1941. After the war, he organized the Shanghai Regiment with 1,200 Jewish volunteers to fight for newborn Israel.)



*This picture of the “upper echelon” showing Two-Gun Cohen, in the white suit, seated with President Chiang Kai-Shek on his right, verifies his importance in Chinese leadership.*

### ***Two-Gun becomes a General***

Two-Gun was named to command the Chinese 19th field army. Time Magazine, in 1931, reported that Cohen “was gazetted by the Canton government a Brigadier General.” He led Nationalist troops in fighting against both the Japanese and communist Chinese.

When the Japanese entered World War II, in 1941, Cohen was captured in Hong Kong. The Japanese now had a great enemy – but they didn’t know it. By identifying himself as a Canadian businessman, he fooled the Japanese.



*Hong Kong – seized by the Japanese in December, 1941.*

Ultimately, Morris Cohen was among a small number of prisoners released in exchange for important Japanese officials held in the US. He returned to Canada. “When we pulled into Montreal,” he said. “I picked up my parcels and stepped down on the platform – a free man.”

On Friday, Dec. 3rd, 1943, the Montreal Gazette reported “A few dozen men and women met early yesterday at Bonaventure station for the sole purpose of meeting the fairytale Chinese general, a Jew by birth a Canadian Citizen, Gen. Morrice Cohen a former aide-de-camp to the famous rebuilder of China, Dr. Sun Yat sen.”

Cohen married a Montreal woman but the affair didn't last. He planned to return to England – but he had one great service to offer to the Jewish people.

In 1945, the United Nations was being formed in San Francisco. And a resolution proposing the partitioning of Palestine into two states – one Jewish and the other Arabic – was to be submitted to the new organization. The international Jewish community was on hand to do what it could to see that the Resolution was passed.

Two-Gun flew to San Francisco and convinced the head of the Chinese delegation to abstain from voting when he learned they planned to oppose partition. That abstention ultimately helped ensure passage of the measure partitioning Palestine – and allowing the creation of Israel.



*Two Gun's gravestone in Manchester.*

He died in Manchester and was buried there with a trilingual headstone – in English, traditional Hebrew and in Chinese (a tribute from the people he served so well.) The tribute identified him as “Mah Sam” – as close as the Chinese could get to Morris Cohen. It means “clenched fist.”

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