

THE STORY OF ONE MARINE

*The World War I Letters and
Photos of Pvt. Thomas L. Stewart*

Edited by

JAMES P. GREGORY, JR.

In memory of
David Woodson Kirk

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*Of course it's not a picnic to charge thru a field
or wood swept with a machine gun and artillery
barrage, but it doesn't last long, and, after
all, is the greatest game of them all, and the
Americans are the best sportsmen.*

THOMAS L. STEWART

PREFACE

ON APRIL 6, 2017, the United States celebrates the 100th anniversary of joining the First World War. Once the United States joined the war, it was only 19 months until the surrender of Germany. Throughout those months, the US brought in more than four million soldiers to partake in the war, with half of those participating overseas. Out of that four million, more than nine thousand Marines served overseas.¹

Thomas L. Stewart enlisted in the Marine Corps on June 27, 1917 at Paris Island, South Carolina. From the day he boarded the train to Paris Island to his last day in Europe, Tom sent home letters to his family. These letters shed light on what he did in training, the deployment overseas, battles against the Germans, his wounding, Military Police (MP) duty in France at the hospital, the armistice, his time at the American University in Beaune, travel across France, his travel back to his company, and Occupation Force duty on the Rhine. These letters describe his thoughts and actions as the war progressed around him. However, not all of these survive today. Luckily, Tom's sister, Vera, transcribed the letters during, or shortly after, the war. Then, in the early 2000's, Tom's daughter, Carolyn, transcribed Vera's copies into Microsoft Word, thus saving them and making them easily accessible for my research.

Tom also carried a Kodak camera with him during his training at Paris Island, South Carolina and at Quantico, Virginia, during his time as an MP, and during his time occupying Germany. These provide a unique view into his life as he saw it 100 years ago. The letters are transcribed from the original documents and

1 Mitchell Yockelson, "They Answered the Call: Military Service in the United States Army During World War I, 1917-1919," *Prologue* 30, no. 3 (Fall 1998), www.archives.org.

incorporated in their original form with misspellings, punctuation errors, and notations. Many primary and secondary sources are incorporated to create a more complete record of this Marine as he was a very humble man who did not speak of his service nor the great battles in which he fought. Being so humble, this book aims to tell his story and show how this one Marine played a role in some of the most decisive battles of the war.

I want to thank the entire Stewart and Kirk family for preserving these documents and Tom's history for the last 100 years and allowing me to access all of the records. I also want to thank Carolyn Stewart Kirk for her work in transcribing the letters and storing all the documents and photos for future generations. I would also like to thank David Kirk for his work in recording an interview with his grandfather, Tom, in the 1980's. It was a great fountain of information directly from the source. I also owe many thanks to Mr. Steven C. Girard, SSG, USA (Ret) for all the help in identifying the photographs taken by Tom, providing captions, and pointing me in the right direction for research whenever I got stuck; without him, I would not have been able to do justice to Tom's legacy. His knowledge and extreme willingness to help has been the greatest source of inspiration while writing. I also want to thank Mr. Kevin Seldon for his help. Also, I'd like to thank James Carl Nelson for the help in finding some research for the book. Finally, I'd like to thank Lenny Moore for help in identifying other soldiers in Tom's photos.

PEOPLE MENTIONED
IN RELATION TO
TOM STEWART

Bob: Margaret Stewart, *sister*

Bob Hood: From Hutchinson, Kansas, a “*flame*” of Lois

Deac: Vernon “Deke” Ward from Spearville, Kansas, *friend*

Doc: James Vivian “Viv” Stewart, *brother*

Dorto: Dorothy Stewart, *sister*

Elizabeth: Elizabeth Leidigh, *cousin*

Em: Emma Leidigh, *aunt*

Folks: Dora Leidigh Stewart and Van Stewart, *mom and dad*

Granny: Grandmother Leidigh, *grandma*

Harry: Harry Leidigh, *uncle*

Helen: Helen Stewart, *sister*

Junior: Harry Leidigh Jr., *cousin*

Katherine: Katherine Leidigh, *cousin*

Lois: Lois Stewart, *sister*

Po: Florence Leidigh (Merrick), *aunt*

Stanley: Stanley Williams from Spearville, Kansas, *friend*

Ted: Theodore Stewart, *brother*

Tom: Tom Westmacott from Spearville, Kansas, *friend*

Vee: Vera Stewart, *sister*

INTRODUCTION

PRE-WAR AND AMERICAN LEAD-UP

THOMAS LEIDIGH STEWART was born on March 6, 1895 in Spearville, Kansas, to Van and Dora Leidigh Stewart. He was the fourth child of eight, but the first son, to Dora and Van—older sisters Vera (1887), Helen (1889), and Lois (1893), younger brother James “Viv” (1899), younger sisters Dorothy (1902) and Margaret (1903), and youngest brother Ted (1905). He grew up in a small town with a population of around 600 people. His mother kept him from school until he was 7 years old because she needed help with his younger brother and sister. However, he managed to make the grades and graduate on time.

Tom was in the first graduating class of Spearville High School in 1913 as one of six seniors. After graduation, he went to work at the First National Bank in Spearville, which his family owned. Once he had saved enough money, he attended Colorado College from Fall 1913 to Spring 1915. While there, he became a member of the Phi Delta Theta fraternity. Around this time, he also joined the Masonic lodge under the Order of the Eastern Star. Once he returned to Spearville, Tom moved in with his Grandmother Leidigh. He then worked at the large general store in town for a while until accepting a job back at First National Bank as a bookkeeper.

The War

Austria’s Arch Duke, Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated on June 28, 1914 in Sarajevo, Bosnia. This caused a wave of violence to race across Europe as blame was thrown from one coun-

try to another. The culmination of this blame was the Great War. Russia, Germany, France, Great Britain, the Austro Hungarians, and the Ottoman Empire waged massive all-out war on each other, ruining the picturesque landscapes of Europe and the Middle East. By 1917, the war had been raging for over 3 years. It pushed rapid industrialization as new machines of war were deployed in great numbers across three continents. Along with the machines, innovative methods of warfare were developed to combat the devastating firepower the machines could put out. Trenches became the means of transportation, message relay, and defense as they proved to be safe out of sight of the enemy scopes. Trench networks spread over 500 miles from the English Channel to the border of Switzerland. This created a stalemate as neither side could dislodge the opponent from their position.

The United States avoided being dragged into the quagmire of the European War. Instead, the US sold aid to France and Great Britain. However, as the aid increased, the Germans began using submarines, called U-boats, to track and attack the American shipments in the Atlantic Ocean. By 1917, these attacks had escalated to a point that the Americans could not ignore them any longer.

On top of the U-boat attacks, the United States faced another threat below their own border with Mexico. Pancho Villa, a Mexican revolutionary, raided the southern territory of the US around Columbus, New Mexico, killing eight soldiers and nine civilians. This caused U.S. President Woodrow Wilson to send the army under Brigadier General John Pershing into Mexico to pursue Villa.²

On March 1, 1917, President Wilson made the Zimmerman telegram public. This was a telegram from German Foreign Secretary Alfred Zimmerman to the German ambassador in Mexico. It proposed a military alliance between Germany and Mexico

2 Thomas Boghardt, "Chasing Ghosts in Mexico: The Columbus Raid of 1916 and the Politicization of U.S. Intelligence during World War I," *Army History* (Fall 2013): 7-10.

in the event that the United States declared war on Germany. It promised the return of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona to Mexico at the end of the war.³ Then, on March 18, President Wilson learned that German submarines had sunk three American ships in the English Channel as they headed back towards Texas.⁴ On April 6, 1917 the United States Congress declared war upon Germany.

The nation now prepared to go to war. No one could envision how great the American war contribution would be but the nation began to collect supplies and manpower. American citizens started to see the war as a duty to not only country but to the security of the world. Thomas Stewart was another young American, 22 at the time, who saw war service as his duty. The following letter, documents, and memoir excerpts show how he and his family prepared for the upcoming conflict.

Excerpt from a letter to Van from Tom's aunt Minnie Stewart, May 2, 1917.

My Dear Van,

I made some good resolutions the first of the year about writing letters to the home folks, but guess I am getting behind. It hardly seems like the 2nd of May, for it is quite cold and we are still wearing winter wraps. Occasionally we have a few warm days, but they don't last. People haven't much garden made yet, but there will be more than usual made this year, as it looks like we would need all the eatables we could get in any way to feed our own people and the Allies, etc. I still, as we all did, hoped that we could keep out of the terrible War, but I guess for humanity's sake, as well as our own Country's, we

3 Byron Farwell, *Over There: The United States in the Great War, 1917-1918* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999), 33-34.

4 Frank Freidel, *Over There: The Story of America's First Great Overseas Crusade* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990), 4.

will have to enter into it for all we are worth. I think the German Rulers are out to conquer the world, if they can. I am wondering whether any of the Stewart boys will have to enlist. It seems dreadful to think of all War means, especially this War.

Minnie Stewart

Excerpt from Tom's Memoir

Young men knew they had a duty and mulled over what branch of the service was best for them. By May, Tom Westmacott, Deke Ward, and myself went to Wichita to join up for Officers training. They wanted only college graduates and Deke was the only one. We were told that we would be notified and we went back home but none was accepted.

Tom and his friends went on May 10, 1917 with letters of recommendation when they attempted to apply for Officers training. Even though they were not accepted, two of these surviving letters affirm Tom's character and his abilities.

Letter of Recommendation for Tom from P.T. Westmacott, May 10, 1917

To Whom It May Concern:

This is to certify that Thomas Leidigh Stewart was in our employ for two years, and I can say without question that he is steady and industrious. His morals and character are of the best and he commands the greatest respect of all with whom he comes in contact. It is with pleasure that I am able to give this un-reserved recommendation.

Yours truly,

The Edwards & Nichols Lbr. And Sup. Co.

P.T. Westmacott

Treasurer

***Letter of Recommendation for Tom from Unknown
Signature, May 7, 1917***

Dear Sir,

I am writing to recommend Mr. T. L. Stewart of Spearville, Kansas.

Mr. Stewart was a student at Colorado College. He has unusual ability and strength of character and should make an efficient officer. He would command the respect of his men. I recommend him without reservation.

Sincerely yours,
Unknown Signature

Excerpt from Tom's Memoir

On June 5th all young men were to register for the draft so I went to Dodge City to register, it was a rainy day and I spent the afternoon in a hotel lobby waiting for the train home, after the few minutes registering.

As these letters and documents show, Tom was ready to do his part for the war. After signing up for the draft, less than a month passed before he and his friends, Stanley Williams and Deke Ward, traveled to Wichita, Kansas to enlist in the United States Marine Corps.

CHAPTER ONE

ENLISTMENT

AFTER FAILING TO QUALIFY for officer training, Tom and his friends decided that they would not just sit idly by and wait to be drafted. On June 20, 1917, Tom, Stanley Williams, and Deke Ward traveled to the Marine recruiting station in Wichita, Kansas. Tom was 22 years old at this time. Once there, all three men were given physicals. Tom and Stanley passed the test but Deke did not and was sent home. After passing their first physical, they were put on a train to St. Louis, Missouri where they received another physical. The next day, the 22nd, they were put on the Louisville and Nashville Railroad to Atlanta, Georgia and given instructions on how to proceed.

Tom's Travel Instructions

United States Marine Corps
Central Recruiting Division
Headquarters District of Missouri
215 Fullerton Bldg., 122 N. 7th St.
St Louis, Missouri

June 22, 1917

From: Officer in Charge.

To: Accepted Applicant Thomas L. Stewart, M.C.

Subject: Travel Orders

You will proceed this date via the Louisville and Nashville Railroad to Atlanta, Ga., where, immediately upon your arrival you will report to the Officer in Charge, Southeastern Recruiting District for further transportation to the Marine Barracks, Port Royal, S.C.

Your train schedule is as follows:

Leave St Louis, Mo. 4:09 PM
 Arrive Nashville, Tenn. 2:30 AM
 Leave Nashville, Tenn. 3:00 AM
 Arrive Atlanta, Ga. 11:45 AM

Upon your arrival in Atlanta look for a man in uniform standing by the Marine Corps Recruiting Sign at Station. Should you fail to see him ask the way of the Station attendants and proceed to the Marine Recruiting Station, 29-1/2 Marietta Street, or if after 5:00 PM report to the Kimball Hotel, Corner Wall and Prior Streets, directly across the street from the Union Depot.

Transportation and Subsistence for the travel involved is necessary in the public service are herewith furnished you.

F. M. Fslick.

During this ride, the recruits prepared for their official examinations to determine if they could become Marines. This was a bit of disappointment for Tom and Stanley as they believed they would be training in California.⁵ However, despite his disappointment, Tom was lucky enough to meet the standards for the Corps. One poor recruit was too skinny to make the weight and as Tom says in his memoir: “he ate bananas (the only food available) all the way to Atlanta where we stopped over night at the Kimball House.”⁶ Once they arrived in Atlanta, they were sent to Port Royal, South Carolina and examined. From there they were sent via motor boat to Paris Island, South Carolina.

Paris Island was an eight-thousand-square-acre piece of hot, insect-infected, flat bog that became the primary recruit depot and training ground for Marines who had enlisted east of the

5 Paris Island was supposed to be the training base for all recruits East of the Mississippi and all recruits from the West were to train in California.

6 Tom later admits that the poor recruit did manage to make the weight.

Mississippi.⁷ When the Marines arrived in 1917 the island was still being constructed. It had no roads, barracks, nor latrines capable of handling the thousands of new recruits.⁸ These new Marines were given physical work to strengthen their bodies that consisted of digging the latrines, trenches for pipelines, collecting shells for roads, and mixing concrete for the barracks and other works. It was a hard life but it was meant to be. As Tom says later in a letter, “the life on the island really shouldn’t be called a part of the life in the service for they make it hard on recruits purposely. I suppose so they won’t crab if they ever run up against anything like it on an expeditionary force or something where it can’t be helped.” At one point the Marines were told point blank: “Don’t write home and tell your impressions till you get to the barracks as you might influence men not to enlist.” Tom was assigned to the 82nd Company, Company “H”, while on the island. The island was hell on earth but it is where the Marines were hardened before moving on to further training.

Letter to Folks, June 22, 1917

Wellington Hotel
St. Louis, Mo.
June 22, 1917

Dear Folks:

Got in here yesterday morning. Went right up and got examined. We both got by but they sure had me worried for a while. Pretty strict, and I have a tendency toward flat feet but they let me by on it.

We are shipped this evening at four PM to Port Royal—a whole car of us. I don’t know whether we go in

7 James Carl Nelson, *I Will Hold: The USMC Legend Clifton B. Cates, from Belleau Wood to Victory in the Great War*, (New York: New American Library, 2016), 26.

8 Ibid, 27.

a cattle car or a Pullman. We expected to get out yesterday but they held us till today, so we got to see some of the town. Went out to the "Y" and looked up an old college friend and brother, and also chased out to some of the parks.⁹

The Marines are sure fine fellows. Both at Wichita and here they have sure treated us fine. Gentlemen and good fellows. Haven't seen anyone above top sergeant yet. Most all sergeants, and have met and talked to several who were at Vera Cruz, one who was wounded there. There were nine wounded out of a 3000 landing party. That's not bad.

Sure is a chance to enlist here. Take anything you want. Army, Navy, Marines, national guards, truck drivers, or anything, and lots of publicity.

Also went in and got pilly with a couple of bank presidents.

Well must close this. Will write when we arrive at Port Royal. Will get our uniforms and equipment there; and no other clothes allowed in the barracks till training is over. They are rushing them thru and we probably will be there but six weeks.

Will send you an address as soon as we get there. Imagine U.S.M.C., Port Royal, S.C. will reach us all right tho.

Lots of love,
TOM.

9 The "Y" referring to the YMCA.

Letter to Folks, June 26, 1917

At Quarantine Station
Port Royal, S.C.

Dear Folks,

Well we have arrived and we are awaiting examination. They say they give some examination here, but I guess we can get by all right.

Well I guess I'd better start and tell about the trip. The first thing of interest after we left Wichita was the oil well district. We passed right thru the Augusta fields; and the wells are thicker than windmills in Spearville. One in every back yard and sometimes two or three.

We passed thru the Ozarks in the night so didn't get to see much there. We were held over in St. Louis, so looked around a bit. Also went out and visited a college fraternity brother. We left there on a limited train. Had nearly 30 fellows, all a pretty good sort. Of course a couple of rowdies which we had to endure.

I was a little disappointed in the Mississippi, also in the Ohio River. Didn't quite come up to my expectations. We went thru a corner of Indiana—Evansville the stop there. Then thru Kentucky and Tennessee. It was daylight when we crossed the Cumberland Mts. and we sure saw some pretty country. Began to run into some pines from there on, but different from the Colorado pines.

Then we went on into Georgia; they are thicker and are largely pine there also. We went down a little way into Alabama, stopped at Stevenson. Also stopped at Chattanooga and saw the Little General, the principal actor in Andrews famous raid. We went over the same route but from the opposite direction. Also saw Big

Shanty, (Kansan now) where the locomotive was stolen and the raid began.¹⁰

The soil in Georgia is as red as the reddest face brick you ever saw and is of claylike consistency. From the Cumberlands to Atlanta is mostly a corn country and a little cotton as you near Atlanta.

Little old huts and negroes everywhere; very few whites except in the towns, and there they are outnumbered.

Atlanta is a pretty nice town. Crooked as can be tho. A terrible lot of niggers; and the whites that are here have the money. The girls are pretty as pictures.

Sure didn't like St. Louis. It is the dirtiest hole I ever struck and wet. About ten times as bad as Denver when I was there, and it was wide open then.

There are about 20,000 soldiers at Atlanta and almost every other white person is a soldier. There will be some 80,000 later, as the cantonment will be there.

Georgia and S. Carolina are both bone dry without the bone dry however, as there seems to be plenty of ways of getting it.

The soil gets better as we go to S.C. Also gets low. When there is a stream there are semi swamps for about a mile around it. There are southern pines all along after you get into S.C., pretty heavily wooded.

We got on a jerk water from Augusta on and got to the end of the line about seven thirty last night. Shipped in a boat and started out again. We are on an island about three miles from the mainland. It does not seem like it tho, for we haven't seen the sea, tho the lagoons have more water in them than any I have ever seen.

The Atlantic fleet, or a part of it, is over at Charleston not far from here.

10 I believe he means that Big Shanty is now called Kennesaw not Kansan.

Our work has not yet begun, tho we had “submarine drill” this AM. We will be examined this PM or tomorrow and vaccinated. Then sworn in and given equipment. We can’t keep a thing so I guess I’ll send mine home. We are in quarantine now and not at the barracks. It will be some three weeks before we get there. Here is where we get our labor and hardships. Everything is new; just put up over night. One of the N.C.O. said that if we went on an expedition, we wouldn’t see any more hardships than we will here the next few weeks. However it doesn’t look so bad and when it’s over it’s smooth sailing and a good time.

There is no censorship of mail as yet and every one is anxious for there not to be, and to that end we are advised not to tell very much about anything here. So don’t repeat anything except that I’m here working hard and having a good time.

We have no butter nor condiments and only two things to eat usually, and coffee, but plenty of whatever there is.

Ever since five thirty there has been a constant volley over on the range. About three companies, they are almost thru their “hell” and about ready to go to the barracks. There are over 6500 men on the island now, recruits and old men.

Whenever anyone has time, be sure to write. I don’t have any other address than U.S.M.C., Port Royal S.C. We move about from one camp to another so that we can’t give a real definite one but guess they will find us eventually.

Must close this now. Ink gave out so I had to use pencil. Please excuse.

Lots of love,
TOM.

Would give a little for a freshwater bath. This stuff leaves you so sticky.

Letter to Viv, June 27, 1917

Port Royal, S.C.
Quarantine Station.
Wednesday.

Dear Viv:

Well we got our uniforms today. There has sure been enough red tape about it. Took all day yesterday to be examined. Sure learn to be patient standing in line under a tropical sun with nothing on but a towel. They wear anything—that is up till the time they get their uniforms. From a towel on up. It is hot as the deuce until you get in the shade, then as cool as you could wish for. Have ocean breeze all right and tide but that's all the ocean we've seen or are likely to see for weeks. We are all at quarantine station. Have all been vaccinated and are in quarantine right as there is one case of small pox.

Ordinarily we would go "over the fence" in a day or two. As it is no one knows, so address me there until further notice as it will follow us anyway. (Co. 82).

I sent my suitcase to dad and necessarily had to send it collect (unless U.S. pays—nothing was said). Now I couldn't shut it very well and couldn't get a strap, but I put my address inside and everything and valued it at \$35 so if it doesn't arrive in a reasonable time, set them after it as I can't from here. It is sent Southern Express.

My suit I think you can wear very well. It needs a good cleaning and pressing. You and dad divide up. I don't want anything and when I come out I'll want to buy new ones anyway. Also at Patchens my trunk is packed except as: two overcoats in the closet—one a piece, a couple of suits also in closet, a tennis racket and a gun. In the bottom of the trunk is all dirty clothes. They ought to be taken out and washed and used. Also use any clothes in the top trays. The rest leave in those trays. Whenever anyone goes

to Spearville better check my trunk home on their ticket. The key to it is in top left dresser drawer. I enclose key to suitcase. There are two Phi Delta Theta pins in my coat pocket. Ward wore one. Put them in a safe place—say in with some other stuff like that in upper right hand tray of trunk. Also Masonic lapel button on coat.

Ross promised to deposit \$4.00 per month to dad's credit at the First National for room rent.

Beginning today our hell begins. So if I shouldn't write too frequently don't worry. I'll be all right only working 10 to 16 hours every day. It won't be so bad when we get to the barracks as everything is fixed up fine over there, but here—to do what they said—“Don't write home and tell your impressions till you get to the barracks as you might influence men not to enlist” and, they say it's pretty fine over there. It will have to be to make up for this. But we'll all live thru it and probably be better off.

Saw a steamer today quite a ways out-only could make out the form.

We will get our shots in the arm in a few days. Typhoid, prophylaxis, three shots at intervals of several days. There are a few that faint away every time. Some did when they were vaccinated. It made me sick at my stomach. The grub nearly does that tho. They say its better tho as they go on. We had a bunch of 90 sworn in today and filled in two companies. Ours (82) is not quite full yet. Will be tomorrow.

Must close this now.

Love,
TOM

If you are not at home send this on and let them read it.

Excerpt from Tom's Memoir

Next day train took us to Port Royal, S. C. where an open motor boat took us to Paris Island. Supper time came and we were served a plate of macaroni—no cheese no bread no nothing. It was a big disappointment.

Letter to Folks, July 4, 1917

Paris Island, S. C.

Dear Folks,

This is a holiday. This day and Christmas are the only ones the soldiers get. We have sure had a fair sample so far of a soldier's life.

Yesterday we dug trenches all day for a double purpose I suppose. Anyway it was for a pipeline. Dug in marsh bog and in rock and shell and in the ordinary soil here which was fine—a clay sand and easy to dig.

This morning we had a field meet among the five drill companies in camp. We had a regular meal today too. Chicken, mashed potatoes, dressing, gravy, lemonade, cucumbers, bananas and oranges. Right after dinner, we were just thinking what a good meal we had had and the Captain called for everybody at the dock. New moon last night and an awfully high tide. It began to go out to a correspondingly unusual low level this noon and nearly dumped a gravel barge. He set us to work unloading the barge and it immediately set in and rained to beat the deuce and everyone got soaked to the bone. Just now got my clothes off and a shower.

I haven't gotten a letter yet but suppose it's the rotten mail. Neither Stan nor I have heard from anyone except I had a letter from Mrs. Patchen. No one gets any mail. They sure are rotten in taking care of it.