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OVERTON, JOHN WILLIAMS
(1894 - 1918)
PAPERS
1917 - 1982

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INTRODUCTION

The John Williams Overton Papers (1917 – 1982) are centered around John Williams Overton (1894 – 1918), track star and Marine Corps World War I hero of Nashville, Tennessee. The John Williams Overton Papers are a gift of Mrs. Robert J. Warner, Jr., of Nashville, Tennessee.

The materials in this collection measure .42 linear feet. There are no restrictions on the materials.

Single photocopies of unpublished writings in the John Williams Overton Papers may be made for purposes of scholarly research.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The John Williams Overton Papers, containing approximately 150 items and two volumes, cover the period 1917 – 1982, although the bulk is concentrated between 1917 – 1923. The collection is composed of clippings, correspondence, genealogical data, maps, memoirs, military records, a newspaper, photographs, poetry, printed materials, a scrapbook, a sketch, and tributes.

John William Overton (1894 – 1918), a descendent of a pioneer Davidson County, Tennessee family, set track records at Yale University and later was killed in action while serving with the U. S. Marine Corps in the Second Battle of the Marne in France during the First World War. Clippings detail the athletic achievements of Overton as well as describing his death and later the reburial of his remains in Tennessee.

Correspondence consists of letter of Lieutenant Overton to his parents while serving overseas, letters of condolence upon his death, and communications concerning the exhumation of his body from the American military cemetery in France for reinterment in his home state. Among the sympathy letters received by Overton's parents is one from a former Yale classmate, Samuel W. Meek, who was with Lieutenant Overton at the time of his death on July 18, 1918.

Genealogical data is comprised of lineage charts on the Morgan, Williams, and allied families.

There are two oversize, undated maps in the collection: "Nashville and Environs" and a topographical map of a portion of France.

The memoir is by a French Army Captain recounting the intense fighting for hill 119 (La Cote 119) on the western front on September 25, 1915. The record is written in French. The report was presented to Overton by a French comrade.

The military record is a copy of a French award to Overton.

Photographs include pictures of the Overton family grave markers in Mt. Olivet Cemetery in Nashville. This was the final resting place for John Overton.

Among the printed materials is a guide book to the American military shrine at Chateau-Thierry in France.

The scrapbook is a memoriam to Lieutenant John W. Overton. It is a collection of clippings, generally extolling Overton's track achievements and his military service in the

Great War. Also included are Overton family photographs. It was apparently compiled by Jacob M. Dickinson and presented to Overton's mother, Saidee Williams Overton.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

John Williams Overton

- 1894 October 10, born in Nashville, Tennessee, the son of Jesse Maxwell and Saidee Williams Overton
- Attended the University School at Nashville
- 1913 Graduated from the Hill School at Pottstown, Pennsylvania
- 1913 – 1917 Attended Yale University and graduated with the degree of Bachelor of Arts
- 1917 – 1918 Service with the United States Marine Corps:
 1917 – April 2, enlisted in U. S. M. C.
 May 24, commissioned as Second Lieutenant
 September, graduated from the Marine Officers School at Quantico, Virginia
 1918 – February 4, embarked from Philadelphia for France
 February 26, arrived at Brest, France
 May 31, graduated at the head of his class at officers' training camp at Gondremont, France
 June 1 – 15, stationed on the French front in the Vosges Mountains
 June 16 – July 9, served on the Marine front at Belleau Wood
 July 1, promoted to First Lieutenant
 July 16, ordered with his regiment to the French front near Soissons
 July 19, killed in action near Vierzy, France while serving within the Eightieth Company, Second Battalion, Sixth Regiment, U. S. Marines, Fourth Brigade, Second Regular U. S. Division and buried in the U. S. military cemetery at Ploisy, France
 1923 – remains reinterred in Mt. Olivet Cemetery, Nashville, Tennessee

Achievements and Awards

Indoor track records: 1, 000 yards – 2 minutes, 14 seconds

One mile – 4 minutes, 16 seconds

Military decorations (awarded posthumously): Navy Cross

Distinguished Service Cross

CONTAINER LIST

Microfilm Container List

Reel:

1. Box 1, folder 1 to Box 1, folder 23

Microfilm Reel # 1

Box 1

1. Clippings – “Nashville Did its Part in World War I”
2. Clippings – Overton, J. W. – track star
3. Clippings – Overton, J. W. – death and funeral
4. Clippings – U. S. Marine counter attack in the Marne, July 18, 1918
5. Correspondence – Bush - Harbord
6. Correspondence – Hardin – Overton, Jesse
7. Correspondence – Overton, John W.
8. Correspondence – Overton, Saidee – unknown
9. Diaries, memoirs, etc. – “La Cote [The Hill] 119”
10. Genealogical data – Morgan, Williams, and allied families
11. Lists – Nashville’s Gold Star Roll
12. Military records – Awards – Diplome D’Honneur to John W. Overton (copy)
13. Newspaper – Yale Daily News, Feb. 8, 1917
14. Photographs, drawings, etc. – Mt. Olivet Cemetery – Overton grave markers
15. Photographs, drawings, etc. – Overton’s J. W. track medals
16. Poetry – “In Belleau Wood” – Henrietta K. Reeves
17. Poetry – re: death of John W. Overton
18. Printed materials – “Chateau Thierry”
19. Printed materials – “A History of Yale Track”
20. Printed materials – “Johnny Overton: A Yale Great Remembered”
21. Printed materials – “Marriage” – Wm. Lyon Phelps
22. Sketches – Biographical – John W. Overton
23. Tributes – John W. Overton

Volumes

Scrapbook – “In Memoriam Lieutenant John W. Overton”

THS Map Drawer No. 1

Maps – “Nashville and Environs”

Maps – Topographical portion of France

NAME INDEX

This is a name index of only the correspondence in the John Williams Overton Papers, together with the dates of the letters and information regarding their contents. The figures in parentheses denote the number of letters, if more than one. The last numbers refer to the box and folder in which the material is to be found.

Bush, Prescott to Mrs. Jesse Overton, 1918, re: sympathy on loss of son; high standard of bravery and self-sacrifice set by John, 5

Chaplin, D. D., Jr. to Mrs. Lucius Robinson, 1918, re: pride in having known her brother, John, 5

Clark, N. Brooks to Ruth Warner, 1982, re: death of Sam Meek; Prospect of a future article on the track exploits of [John Overton] for Sports Illustrated, 5

Clune, Henry to Mrs. Lucius Robinson, 1918, re: describes a chance meeting with a soldier who had served under John Overton and the leadership qualities exhibited by Lt. Overton, 5

Gile, David E. to Ruth Warner, 1981, re: enclosure of copy of newspaper article re John Overton's death and copy of a letter to Samuel W. Meek from Overton's father, 5

Hadley, [Arthur Twining] to John W. Overton, 1917, re: name of recommended list to take exam for commission in Marine Corps, 5

Hall, Alice to Mrs. L. W. Robinson, Jr., 1918, re: sympathy on loss of brother, 5

Harbord, J. G. (2) to Mrs. Jesse Overton, 1923 and 1924, re: enclosure of a copy of a letter to exhume the body of John Overton for reburial; pleasure to receive letter and renewal of acquaintance, 5

Hardin, John to Harriet [Robinson], n.d., re: how proud he and other soldiers were of John Overton's sacrifice, 6

Harrison, Carter H. to Jesse M. Overton, 1921, describes his visit to American military cemetery in France in which the body of John Overton was buried; enclosure of two snapshots of the Overton grave site, 6

Holton, Mrs. Jessie M. to Mrs. Lucius Robinson, Jr., 1918, re: expressions of sympathy on loss of brother, 6

James, Ellery to Mrs. Overton, 1919, re: the anniversary of John's death; question of proper memorial for John; portrait to be painted and hung at Yale; how John represented "the best of America in the greatest sacrifice," would like to meet the Overtons, 6

Lee, Burton to Yale Bureau, American University Union, 1918, re: death and burial of John Overton [copy of letter], 6

Meek, Sam W., Jr. to Jesse M. Overton, 1918, re: disposition of personal effects of his Yale classmate and friend John Overton following his death; John's last words; John's promotion; sympathy, 6

Meek, Samuel to Harriet [Robinson], 1919, re: enclosure of a copy of a recommendation that the late John Overton be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, 6

Meek, Samuel W. to John Sloane, 1957, re: facts relating to the death of John Overton; Overton's bravery and sacrifice, 6

Mihoff, Michael to John Overton, 1918, re: [letter written in French], 6

Overton, J. M. (3) to Mrs. L. W. Robinson, 1918, re: letter from John indicating that he has been in the Second Battle of the Marne; reports that John has been killed in action; leaving for Monterey for weekend; invitation to visit, 6

Overton, John W. (7) to Mr. and Mrs. L. W. Robinson, Jr., 1917 – 1918, re: enjoyed visit; thanks for letter and sweater; on board ship and expects to sail shortly; has been in France almost a month and has been "on the go" continuously; finished an Infantry School with highest mark; practicing French with Parisian girl; cautions

Harriet about getting sick; billeted with his Company in the countryside; stays every other night in a French peasant's home; has to prove his leadership ability with his platoon; very busy at school; on an observation assignment with a battalion of French Chasseurs at the battle front; thanks for letters; has just returned from the front lines unharmed; staying in a French home on the Marne; expects to return to the front shortly, 7

Overton, Saidee W. to John W. Meeks, 1923, re: wishes the War Department to secure the return of her son's body to the United States for burial in Nashville [copy of letter; letters attached relating to the return of Lt. Overton's body], 8

Percy, H. O. to Mrs. Lucius Robinson, Jr., 1918, re: thanks for plates; telephone call from Johnny before he sailed; also letter received just before he was killed, 8

Phelan, F. E. to Mrs. Jesse Overton, 1923, re: sympathy; was with Johnny on the day he was killed, 8

Phelps, Wm. Lyon (2) to J. M. Overton, 1918 and 1921, re: testimonial on how much John was held in esteem at Yale; talked of John at 1917 class dinner recently, 8

[Robinson, Mrs. Lucius, Sr.] to Harriet Robinson, Jr., 1918, re: shocked to learn of John's death; glad to know that Harriet is going home to be with her bereaved parents; reference to many Yale boys being killed at the Battle of the Marne, 8

Shepard, Frank to Mr. Overton, n.d., re: expression of great loss on John's death' [six photos attached], 8

Thomas, Co., Jr. to Mrs. J. M. Overton, 1923, re: regrets that he cannot attend the re-interment of John, 8

GENEALOGICAL CHART FOR
JOHN WILLIAMS OVERTON

