

Thomas Holcomb

A Register of His Papers in the Archives Branch



Archives Branch

Marine Corps History Division

Quantico, VA

2007

Introduction

The Archives Branch supports the professional military education requirements of Marine Corps residential and distance learning programs. The Archives is the chief repository for reporting units, as well as for the personal papers of current and veteran Marines. The Archives is open without appointment to both military and civilian patrons. Patrons may bring laptops, digital cameras, and scanners for personal use.

The Archives Branch is located at 2044 Broadway Street, Quantico, VA 22134

Phone: (703) 784-4685. Email: mcu_archives@usmcu.edu

Collection Summary

Title: Papers of Thomas Holcomb

Collection Number: COLL/80

Accession Number: 2001-80

Physical Characteristics: 44 standard legal size document boxes; 2 oversized boxes; 21 linear feet

Span Dates: 1892-1978

Language: English

Creator: Thomas Holcomb, 1879-1965

Administrative Information

Restrictions: Collection is open to all researchers

Preferred citation: Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information:

Papers of Thomas Holcomb, [Folder heading], COLL/80, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA

Provenance: The papers of Thomas Holcomb were donated to the Marine Corps Historical Branch by General Holcomb in 1963. In 1988 after the publishing of his register of Thomas Holcomb's papers, Gibson B. Smith added some of his research materials concerning Holcomb to the collection. The papers were transferred from the Historical Branch to the Archives and Special Collections at Quantico in 1999. In 2006, the family of General Holcomb donated more of his personal papers expanding the scope of the collection.

Biographical Sketch

Thomas Holcomb was born on August 5, 1879 in New Castle, Delaware. He entered the Marine Corps on April 13, 1900 as a second lieutenant. Holcomb's first tour of duty was

with the North Atlantic Fleet, including some expeditionary force maneuvers at Culebra, Puerto Rico between 1900 and 1903. He won the long-distance rifle championship at the International Matches at Ottawa, Canada in 1902. In 1903, he received a promotion and was put in charge of the U.S. Marine Corps Rifle Team. He led this team to the national championship in 1911.

As a lieutenant and captain, Holcomb served in the Far East from 1908-1914. He was with the 1st Marine Brigade in the Philippines and then with the American Legation Guard in Peking.

Before World War I, the Commandant, George Barnett, brought Holcomb to work with him at Headquarters in Washington, DC. He served as special aide-de-camp to Barnett. In 1916, Barnett promoted Holcomb to major.



On November 11, 1916, Holcomb married Beatrice Clover, the daughter of Rear Admiral Richardson Clover and they had one son, Franklin P. Holcomb, born in 1919.

Holcomb was put in charge of the 2nd Battalion, 6th Marines during its preparation for American Expeditionary Force duties at Quantico from 1917 until the battalion saw action in France at Belleau Wood in 1918. After returning from Europe, Holcomb was put in charge of the Marine Barracks at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and from 1927-1930 he commanded the American Legation Guard at Peking.

Holcomb was appointed Major General Commandant in December 1936. His tenure as Commandant over the next seven years coincided with a period of incredible growth and change for the Corps. In 1936, the Marine Corps consisted of barely 17,000 men. In preparation for World War II, Holcomb was instrumental in increasing the size of the force and implementing necessary training. President Roosevelt extended him beyond the normal four year term as Commandant in 1940 and then exempted him from mandatory retirement at age 64 in August 1943. Upon his retirement in 1944, the Marine Corps had grown in size to over 300,000 men.

From June 1944 to June 1948, Holcomb served as chief diplomatic representative in Pretoria, South Africa. Upon leaving Pretoria, Holcomb resumed his life of farming at Rosecroft in Maryland. He moved to Chevy Chase, Maryland in 1956, and returned to New Castle, Delaware one year before his death on May 24, 1965.

Scope and Content Note

The Papers of Thomas Holcomb consist of materials relating mainly to his career with the Marine Corps as Major General Commandant and his position of American Minister to South Africa. The dates of the collection range from 1892-1978. Also included are some

research materials gathered by Gibson B. Smith when writing a register of Holcomb's Personal Papers. They include copies of materials from various branches of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

Included in this collection is correspondence of the Office of the Commandant as well as personal correspondence, diaries kept by Holcomb, newspaper clippings, Marine Corps publications, field message books, and photographs of and taken by Holcomb. The majority of the collection consists of materials from when Holcomb was Commandant and American Minister to South Africa, but also included is some correspondence and items from time spent in China and during his retirement.

The collection is arranged alphabetically by subject headings and chronologically within each series. For all of the subject headings, some were assigned by Holcomb and others were imposed by the processor. Series in this collection include correspondence, diaries, oral histories, public relations, publications, and photographs. The size of the collection is approximately 21 linear feet.

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Series 1. Correspondence, 1892-1964

1.1 General, 1892-1964

1.2 By Subject, 1905-1963

Series 2. Diaries, 1899-1963

Series 3. Oral Histories

Series 4. Public Relations and Newspaper Clippings, 1918-1965

Series 5. Publications, 1935-1978

Series 6. Subject Files

Series 7. Photographs

7.1 Album

7.2 By Subject

Series 1. Correspondence, 1892-1964

This series consists of correspondence produced and received by Holcomb. The series is arranged into two subseries: General and By Subject.

Series 1.1 Correspondence, General, 1892-1964

Arrangement: ascending chronological order by date written

This series consists of the correspondence of Thomas Holcomb and the Office of the Commandant. The majority is chronologically arranged copies of letters sent out from the Office of the Commandant. Incoming correspondence is also interfiled. These letters cover his duties as Commandant as well as some personal letters to family members and friends. The last folders are personal correspondence written during his retirement. The last folder contains photocopies of miscellaneous correspondence held in other institutions.

Series 1.2 Correspondence, By Subject, 1905-1963

Arrangement: alphabetical by subject

This series consists of correspondence files arranged by subject headings. They cover correspondence from the beginning of Holcomb's Marine Corps career to well into his retirement. Of note are some early letters written to his future wife Beatrice Clover and his mother, Elizabeth Hindman Barney. There are also several folders of congratulatory letters sent to Holcomb on the occasions of his various promotions. There is a great amount of correspondence from Holcomb's time as American Minister to South Africa. Some of this correspondence consists of copies made by Gibson B. Smith of letters from NARA. The latest letter written was to his friend, General Vandegrift requesting a time to get together and talk about their time in the Corps.

Series 2. Diaries, 1899-1963

Arrangement: ascending chronological order by date

This series consists of diaries kept by Holcomb throughout his life. The entries aren't very detailed, but he made entries nearly every day.

Series 3. Oral Histories

Arrangement: alphabetical by name of interviewee

This series consists of notes, transcripts and recordings of oral histories of friends and family members of Holcomb. They consist of conversations remembering Holcomb and the Marine Corps during his time as Commandant. The bulk of the interviews were conducted by Gibson B. Smith during the process of conducting research for his publication on the Personal Papers of Thomas Holcomb.

Series 4. Public Relations and Newspaper Clippings, 1918-1965

Arrangement: alphabetical by title or subject heading

This series consists mainly of newspaper articles, news releases, and speeches related to the Marine Corps. There also is a large number of copies of the Quantico Sentry. The speeches included were made while Holcomb was Commandant and also when he served as American Minister to South Africa.

Series 5. Publications, 1935-1978

Arrangement: alphabetical by title

This series consists mostly of research publications used by Smith that contain historical information about Holcomb and the Marine Corps. Many of them were published by the Marine Corps History Division. Others are photocopies from a variety of books and articles.

Series 6. Subject Files

Arrangement: alphabetical by subject heading

This series consists of miscellaneous files arranged by subject. Some of them are related to Holcomb and some are only general Marine Corps subject files. Of note are Holcomb's handwritten Field Message Books and his "Interesting File" in which he kept letters and mementos. As is the case in other series, there is a great amount of material from research done by Gibson Smith.

Series 7. Photographs

This series consists of photographs of and taken by Thomas Holcomb. It is arranged into two subseries: Albums and Photographs By Subject. Holcomb was a very active and experimental photographer which these images reflect.

Series 7.1 Photographs, Album

Arrangement: alphabetical by subject heading

This subseries consists of photograph albums arranged by Holcomb. The great majority of the albums are of photographs taken while he was in China. There are also books of negatives and an album of photographs taken into his retirement.

Series 7.2 Photographs, By Subject

Arrangement: alphabetical by subject heading

This subseries consists of photographs of and taken by Thomas Holcomb. They are arranged alphabetically by subject. They cover Holcomb's time in the Marine Corps from the beginning through his position as American Minister to South Africa.

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Oversize

Oversize materials are identified as materials that are too large to fit in a standard legal size (8½ × 14 inches) folder.

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