

The Forgotten Front

THE 4TH BRIGADE OF MARINES IN THE TOULON SECTOR: MARCH–MAY 1918

by James P. Gregory Jr.

Abstract: Marines deployed to Verdun in the Toulon sector during World War I got a unique introduction to the reality of modern warfare there. During this training and acclimatization period, they experienced the hardships of trench warfare and their first combat and casualties of the war. Yet, most World War I histories omit the preparatory experiences of the 4th Brigade of U.S. Marines at Toulon and the valuable lessons this training period conferred, an oversight which this article seeks to begin to correct.

Keywords: 4th Brigade, Verdun, Toulon sector, World War I

In the annals of Marine Corps history, discussion of World War I is dominated by the Battle of Belleau Wood, with more recent additions looking at Soissons, Blanc Mont Ridge, and the Meuse-Argonne offensive. However, many of these histories leave out the experiences of the Marines at Verdun in the Toulon sector when they first arrived in France. This period was meant for training with the French and acclimating the Marines to modern warfare. As a result, many historians ignore the Marines' sojourn in Toulon sector as inconsequential because the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) switched to open warfare tactics at Belleau Wood, which they continued to utilize throughout the rest of the war. The time spent in the Toulon sector introduced the 4th Brigade to the reality of a modern war through the hardships of trench warfare and their first combat and casualties

of the war, and it established the Marine Corps as a formidable fighting force. The purpose of this article is to illustrate the personal experiences of the Marines in the 4th Brigade at Toulon; it is not a critical study of the brigade's tactics and operations during this period.¹

Formation

In World War I, the 4th Brigade served in the U.S. 2d Division, which comprised two infantry brigades, each fielding two infantry regiments. In the 2d Division, the U.S. Army's 9th and 23d Infantry Regiments and the 5th Machine Gun Battalion constituted the 3d Infantry Brigade. The Marines comprised the 4th Brigade with the 5th and 6th Marine Regiments and the 6th Machine Gun Battalion. The division would not be formed until September 1917 as these units arrived en masse to France.²

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¹ Part of the reason for this article's personal narrative is the lack of primary and secondary source material on the Marines during this period. In the *Records of the Second Division (Regular)*, 10 vols. (Washington, DC: U.S. Army War College, 1927), comp. by Capt Cylburn O. Mattfeldt, the American records are scant and detailed records from the 4th Brigade do not appear in earnest until June 1918.

² Peter F. Owen, *To the Limit of Endurance: A Battalion of Marines in the Great War* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 31.

The first Marines of the 5th Regiment landed in France on 26 June 1917. By 3 July, the entire regiment was under canvas. Initially, the Marines were assigned guard duty. Eventually, the 1st and 2d Battalions were transferred to the Gondrecourt training area to learn under the so-called French “Blue Devils,” the Chasseurs Alpin. On 24 and 25 September, the 5th Regiment moved to the Bourmont training area. The first units of the 6th Regiment began arriving in France in November 1917. They would join the 2d Division as its nucleus, alongside the 5th Regiment. It would not be until 10 February 1918 that the final Marines of the 6th Regiment would arrive and complete the 4th Brigade. Due to the various guard assignments and piecemeal arrival of the Marines, training did not begin in earnest until February 1918.³

Training

Unfortunately for the earliest units in France, including the 2d Division, the training received from their French and British officer instructors was almost exclusively based on trench warfare. General John J. Pershing had not planned this as the course for the AEF, but that is the training they received due to the nature of the war up to that point.⁴ In January and February 1918, the companies of the 5th and 6th Regiments were billeted in various French towns and given equipment and instruction. For instance, the 96th Company, 6th Regiment, billeted in Blevaincourt where it received its first training in trench warfare. During this period, the Marines received their steel helmets and gas masks. On 15 February 1918, they marched to practice trenches 14.5 kilometers from the village, where the regiment trained mostly at night while enduring freezing temperatures. Private Thomas L. Stewart, 96th Company, 6th Regiment, later recalled of the conditions that “one night we were over there and it turned bitter cold. We did have our blanket but even so we were on our feet for two on and four off but you might as well be on cause you couldn’t sleep, it was too

cold.”⁵ First Lieutenant James McBrayer Sellers, 78th Company, 6th Regiment, also later commented that

at Robecourt, we went through arduous training consisting of practice hikes, more trench digging, bomb throwing, and standing by all night in the trenches. The weather worked against us, and the great deal of mud impeded our progress. Most of the training was done in daylight, and at night we went back to shelter.⁶

During this period, the brigade continually drilled and practiced “machine gun drills; range finding; indirect fire problems; barrage problems; tactical exercises, including long barrage firing; drills and gas masks; digging emplacements; and a French signal section gave instructions on the liaison service in the field.”⁷ To prepare the Marines for trench warfare, they built practice trenches constructed at Saint-Ouen-lès-Parey where raids and reliefs were carried out by the units of the brigade.⁸ The Marines were issued the French M1915 Chauchat light machine gun, which did not find favor among them. First Lieutenant Seller recalled,

My company was issued cheaply manufactured French automatic rifles known as the *Chauchat*. These weapons looked as if they were made out of cigar boxes and tin cans, and we had an awful time making our men carry them. A man shooting one almost was in as much danger as anyone out in front being shot at.⁹

³ Thomas Stewart, interview by David Kirk, 1985, unpublished transcript, based on “Carolyn & Stuart Kirk Interview” home video, ca. 1985–89, author’s personal collection, hereafter Stewart interview.

⁴ William Sellers, James Gregory, and Steven Girard, *C’est La Guerre: The Memoir of Capt. James McBrayer Sellers, USMC* (Oklahoma City, OK: Gray Sparrow Books, 2020), 61–62.

⁵ Maj Edwin N. McClellan, “The Fourth Brigade of Marines in the Training Areas and the Operations in the Verdun Sector,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 5, no. 1 (March 1920): 90–91.

⁶ McClellan, “The Fourth Brigade of Marines in the Training Areas and the Operations in the Verdun Sector,” 91.

⁷ Sellers, Gregory, and Girard, *C’est La Guerre*, 62.

³ George Clark, *Devil Dogs: Fighting Marines of World War I* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1999), 27–39.

⁴ Clark, *Devil Dogs*, 39.

The bitter cold, constant mud, and French weapons were a burden to the Marines, but they would soon face the same conditions in addition to constant harassment by the Germans.

By 1 March 1918, rumors swirled that they would enter the front in a quiet sector. On 10 March, 2d Division Headquarters announced that the “division will move to the front for training for a period of approximately one month. It will be assigned to and installed in the sector now occupied by a French Army Corps, and will be placed under this Corps for tactical instructions.”¹⁰ In preparation for the trenches, equipment such as trench knives, trench boots, and extra clothing started being dispersed.¹¹ Beginning on 13 March through the 17th, the brigade moved to the front. On their arrival at Dugny, a German aviator spied the unloading train and signaled the German artillery. By the time the artillery zeroed its target, the Marines had already begun the march to their destination, which resulted in the only casualties being a lieutenant’s trunk and many of the 5th Regiment’s musical instruments.¹² The Toulon sector would be the brigade’s home for the next three months. The various units were stationed at camps and towns throughout the sector, with several rotating through at Camp L’Eveche, which the Marines later nicknamed “Never Rest.” The Marines were all located near Verdun, where the combined losses of German and French troops had approached more than 600,000 during the largest engagement of the war in 1916. Verdun was rather quiet by the time the Marines arrived, and they were able to go in and visit the city when not on the line.¹³

Trench Life

On 21 March 1918, the Germans launched an offensive along the Somme, cracking the British lines. They followed this success with a second offensive on 9 April

near Lys. In order to send experienced French troops to contain the offensives, the Marines’ time in the trenches would be extended by another month. This long stay in Verdun curtailed the 2d Division’s ability to practice the open warfare maneuvers the AEF depended on.¹⁴

During this time, the various battalions rotated through the front lines so that by the end, every unit had experience in the trenches. This introduced the Marines to valuable skills they would need to survive in France. Although the trench environment would not follow the Marines after their service in the Toulon sector, they carried with them the lessons and stories gathered at Verdun. This also provided the only time that Marines would fight like their British and French allies had for the previous four years, and, for those who would survive the hell that followed, it gave them a unique look at the war. However, this did not mean that the Marines were happy for the experience. To the contrary, as remarked by Lieutenant Colonel Richard Derby, 2d Sanitary Train, 2d Division,

From the beginning our men did not like the trenches. It was not the kind of warfare that appealed to them. Continuous living in the mud with never a sight of the enemy, got on their nerves and made them morose, just as it had done in the case of many good men before them. They were impatient for a fight at close quarters. They despised an enemy that kept himself out of sight, they despised their blue coated neighbors for their apparent indifference to this stationary warfare, and they would have ended in despising themselves. But in spite of rain and mud, that inner fire kept burning, fed by the prospect of leaving the trenches when fine weather had established itself.¹⁵

¹⁰ General Orders No. 23, 10 March 1918, in *Records of the Second Division (Regular)*, vol. 1, comp. Capt Cylburn O. Mattfeldt (Washington, DC: U.S. Army War College, 1927).

¹¹ McClellan, “The Fourth Brigade of Marines in the Training Areas and the Operations in the Verdun Sector,” 92.

¹² McClellan, “The Fourth Brigade of Marines in the Training Areas and the Operations in the Verdun Sector,” 93.

¹³ Sellers, Gregory, and Girard, *C’est La Guerre*, 63.

¹⁴ Owen, *To the Limit of Endurance*, 43–44.

¹⁵ Richard Derby, “Wade In, Sanitary!”: *The Story of a Division Surgeon in France* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1919), 24–25.



Records of the Second Division (Regular), *vol. 10, comp. Capt Cyllburn O. Mattfeldt (Washington, DC: U.S. Army War College, 1927)*
 Map of the Verdun sector, 19 March 1918.

Some Marines did find a way to make the best of their situation by appealing to the emotions of the local French. Corporal Joseph E. Rendinell, 84th Company, 6th Regiment, stated, "We told them that we were going to Verdun because a lot of them have brothers and kin folks there. Some cried, so we cried too. We sure put on a good act because they kept fetching out the wine and cognac. I guess I must have cried at every house in the village."¹⁶

The trench environment taught several aspects of survival to the Marines, from surviving the weapons of war, the tactics involved, to daily life in a mud-covered cesspool. Despite Verdun being referred to as a “quiet sector,” the threat of German military action still persisted. The Marines would be subject to heavy artillery barrages, the use of mustard gas, and the withering fire of German machine guns.

Being most of the Marines' first time under shell fire, they came face to face with their own fears of death alongside the other men of the 2d Division. Private Harry Driscoll, 2d Ammunition Train, 2d Division, admitted to his brother of his first shelling in

¹⁶ Cpl J. E. Rendinell and George Pattullo, *One Man's War: The Diary of a Leatherneck* (New York: J. H. Sears, 1928), 59.



Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

Marines of the 20th Company, 5th Regiment, in the trenches of Verdun.

Verdun, “I am not ashamed to say I had a funny feeling, and although I had gone to confession and communion the Sunday before, I began to think of my past life. Those big shells made me do that.”¹⁷ In the Toulon sector, the Marines would learn the necessary skills to survive against incoming artillery. Private Stewart recalled that they “learned to tell about where they would land by the sound of the various shells.”¹⁸ Constant artillery later became a commonplace condition for the Marines wherever they served throughout the war, but those who learned at Verdun would teach the replacements as they rotated into units.

At this time, gas also became a reality for the Marines who had until then only practiced their gas

mask drills. In the heat of battle, the quick thinking needed to retrieve one’s mask and place it over one’s face while still maintaining combat readiness would prove too much for many Marines who would perish from gas in the coming months. Gas became a very common tool the Germans used against the Marines at Toulon. In writing his article “The Fourth Brigade of Marines in the Training Areas and the Operations in the Verdun Sector,” Major Edwin N. McClellan noted that

whether the Germans labored under the impression that the Americans were afraid of gas, whether it was their policy to administer liberal doses of it to all newly arrived units, or whether it just happened that conditions were favorable, the various American Divisions were all greeted with large

¹⁷ “Driscoll Writes of Experiences,” *Journal and Tribune* (Knoxville, TN), 29 December 1918, 9.

¹⁸ Thomas L. Stewart, “The Story of One Marine,” unpublished memoir, Stewart family’s private collection.

quantities of gas as soon as their arrival became known to the enemy. The Marines, among others, received their share of the poisonous stuff. An extent of the enemy's gas activities can be gained when it is considered that more than four hundred gas shells were dropped within a small area in the rear of the Marines' lines, during one bombardment.¹⁹

Colonel Albertus W. Catlin, commanding officer of 6th Regiment, believed "that the gas was the worst evil we had to encounter, and we learned to dread the deadly smell of mustard."²⁰

The gas attacks could come at any moment, even while the Marines slept. Corporal George W. Ruth, 97th Company, 6th Regiment, remembered one night when "we had the gas alert . . . they hit the end of the barracks house and I am sure I slept some, but whatever I slept that night was with a gas mask on, naturally."²¹ The constant looming threat of a gas attack made many of the Marines jumpy while listening for a gas alarm. This resulted in many false alarms and sometimes to the embarrassment of those raising the alarm, such as when First Lieutenant Sellers "thought I heard a siren go off, so I had the platoon put on their gas masks. The 'siren' turned out to be a mule braying, much to my embarrassment."²²

Alongside the artillery and gas training, time in the trenches also acclimated the 6th Machine Gun Battalion to fighting under real battlefield conditions. Major Littleton W. T. Waller Jr., commanding officer of 6th Machine Gun Battalion, wrote that "in this trench work the machine gunners learned much, although no drills and instructions were held."²³ The

companies built emplacements under camouflage, secured protection against observation from German airplanes, cared for their animals and equipment under adverse conditions, and learned of the supply needs under trench conditions.²⁴ They also learned the proper methods "which up to this time had not been found in textbooks" such as

how to establish mechanical means of covering certain areas with fire at night; safety precautions to keep from shooting into our patrols or working parties; how to furnish sentry and ration details and still get the maximum amount of rest; liaison, a subject which up to this time we had not really understood, and one which is a complete study in itself; and best of all, how to give general directions to platoon and section commanders and to trust to them for the execution of the details to carry these out. Probably the most valuable items of all those learned in this sector was the self-reliance acquired by platoon and section commanders, which taught them to rely on their own judgement and gave them confidence in their own ability to handle their own units under any conditions that might arise.²⁵

Thus, the Marines within the 6th Machine Gun Battalion learned the valuable lessons of warfare that would carry them through the harsh fighting in the following months.

On top of learning survival skills of trench warfare, the Marines needed to learn the tactics required to fight in the trenches. This included reconnaissance and raids into the German lines. Private Stewart recalled of the patrols

You were facing their trenches and they were facing our trenches and ev-

¹⁹ McClellan, "The Fourth Brigade of Marines in the Training Areas and the Operations in the Verdun Sector," 101–2.

²⁰ Albertus Catlin, *With the Help of God and a Few Marines: The Battles of Chateau Thierry and Belleau Wood* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page, 1919; repr. 2016), 40.

²¹ Steven Smith, "WWI George Ruth US Marine—in His Own Words, The Lost Interview," 3 April 2018, YouTube video, 12:59–13:12.

²² Sellers, Gregory, and Girard, *C'est La Guerre*, 67.

²³ Maj L. W. T. Waller, "Machine Guns of the Fourth Brigade," *Marine Corps Gazette* 5, no. 1 (March 1920): 4–5.

²⁴ Waller, "Machine Guns of the Fourth Brigade," 5.

²⁵ Waller, "Machine Guns of the Fourth Brigade," 6.

ery night there would be a patrol go out to try and see if they were making any changes or anything. One thing that always bothered me a little bit, this patrol was not supposed to open fire on anybody, but you were supposed to get back into your trenches as fast as you could and report what you found out. And in my mind I always thought, here we come tearing back, these guys are gonna think we're [Germans] and shoot us but they never did.²⁶

Stewart also wrote home of one particular experience, likely in an observation post, in which "I lived five days out in 'no man's land' without going back as far as the first line. We got two shellings in the five days there, so were glad to get out when we did."²⁷ The grueling schedule of being on post in the trenches began to impact the troops' perceptions. Corporal Joseph E. Rendingell noted, "My eyes got sore looking out in No Man's Land. The bobbed [sic] wire posts and stumps of trees looked like they moved and many a time I let fly thinking they was Germans."²⁸

When they were not fighting or dodging artillery, the Marines of the 4th Brigade worked to acclimate themselves to their new surroundings. The trench environment consisted of mud "knee deep in many places; have running water in the dugouts and water knee deep in some of the bomb proofs."²⁹ Besides the natural conditions of the trenches, the Marines inherited the refuse of the French who had occupied the position before them. First Lieutenant Sellers recalled

Major Thomas Holcomb, USMC, our battalion commander, came out one night shortly after we had arrived at L'Eveche to inspect my platoon. The French had previously occupied the

trenches we were inhabiting, and they had made their bunks out of two by fours and chicken wire, and had left grenades, ammunition, and other supplies in every nook and cranny. Of course, Major Holcomb had to find something to criticize, so he zeroed in on the mess the French had left for us. The Major's criticisms insulted my platoon GySgt. George H. Lyman. As I was coming back around a corner I heard Sergeant Lyman talking to another sergeant, and, referring to Holcomb, he said, "He ain't worth a [c—k] full of cold piss." I had never heard such a vile expression in my entire life. He was taking up for me of course, but I am surely glad the Major did not hear him.³⁰

These conditions did not provide a stable foundation for the Americans and the Marines spent much of their time digging and shoring up the trench networks.

Along with the mud and the combat conditions, the brigade was spread out and separated by large areas, making their movement both difficult and unsafe. For example, First Lieutenant Sellers recalled that the 78th Company spent time near Mont-sous-les-Côtes, once a small village, now uninhabited "except by rats and certain other varmints, and my platoon of Marines. They ought to have called us Maroons though, because nobody could visit there or depart during daylight. We had to sleep all day, stay under cover, then come out and stand to during the night, having breakfast just after nightfall, dinner at 11:30 p.m. and supper about 7 a.m."³¹ The Marines suffered through the trenches and the uncomfortable life offered therein. However, for some officers, life at the front was comfortable.

In late April, Sellers became "a regular cave dweller." His platoon found themselves positioned at

²⁶ James P. Gregory Jr., *The Story of One Marine: The World War I Letters and Photos of Pvt. Thomas L. Stewart* (Ashland, OR: Hellgate Press, 2017), 97.

²⁷ Gregory, *The Story of One Marine*, 111.

²⁸ Rendingell and Pattullo, *One Man's War*, 62.

²⁹ Gregory, *The Story of One Marine*, 105.

³⁰ Sellers, Gregory, and Girard, *C'est La Guerre*, 64.

³¹ Sellers, Gregory, and Girard, *C'est La Guerre*, 65.

the base of an old quarry cliff. The sandstone had a crack in the cliff face where the French had entered and carved out rooms. Sellers was “half way up the face.” He was “as safe as a bug in a rug, in a solid rock dugout built or rather hollowed out of a crack in a quarry wall. I had a bunk for myself, one for my orderly, a little table on which I wrote, a small open fireplace, some shelves, and a couple of benches. I brought several candles with me, also some paper and a pen.”³² However, this was not the norm for many Marines and the unsanitary conditions of the trenches plagued many.

While trying to survive through the realities of trench life, Marines struggled to fight their hunger. Rations became difficult to supply to the men. In simply passing through the trenches, the “gummy viscous mass” of mud meant that stopping for even two minutes would require “considerable effort to extricate one’s feet from the red, sticky mud.”³³ The 6th Machine Gun Battalion suffered due to their units being scattered and assigned to various other companies. At first, they attempted to disperse rations preparation among each company, but as Major Waller remembered, “The gun positions were so far apart that the men carrying the rations were exhausted by the long trips through the mud of the trenches.”³⁴ Private Stewart lamented, “They sure said truly when the guy said ‘give me the safety of the front line’ but there are disadvantages to it even with all its ‘safety.’ It is pretty hard to get up such things as water and ‘chow!’”³⁵ The rations the men could get were scant but, if they were lucky, as Stewart recalled, they could have “bacon and spuds for breakfast; beef and spuds for dinner, and stew and rice for supper; coffee and bread at each meal, and that is all, provided the [German] artillery does not locate our ‘chow’ house.”³⁶ However, as First Lieutenant Sellers noted, “the bread was moldy, and we did not get much. . . . We usually lived on stew



Courtesy of Rachel Douglass

Pvts Thaddeus Forney and Theodore Guerry and Cpl Barry A. Smith.

(known as slum), canned ‘bill,’ and hard tack, with an occasional slab of bacon.”³⁷

It also seemed to one Marine, Private Clifford Medine of the 55th Company, 5th Regiment, that the Germans specifically targeted the American force’s food in an effort to make their lives even more miserable: “Easter Sunday the [Germans] played us a dirty trick. We were going to have a big dinner, turkey and everything, and just a half-hour before they dished out the chow, the damned fools dropped a big shell in the dugout where the kitchen was and out went the big

³² Sellers, Gregory, and Girard, *C’est La Guerre*, 70.

³³ McClellan, “The Fourth Brigade of Marines in the Training Areas and the Operations in the Verdun Sector,” 96.

³⁴ Waller, “Machine Guns of the Fourth Brigade,” 5.

³⁵ Gregory, *The Story of One Marine*, 105.

³⁶ Gregory, *The Story of One Marine*, 107.

³⁷ Sellers, Gregory, and Girard, *C’est La Guerre*, 66.



Courtesy of Rachel Douglass

Marines of the 96th Company, 6th Regiment, resting on 1 May 1918.

feast, flying in all directions, with the cook and a few helpers.”³⁸ One unfortunate instance of this targeting of food left many men of the 95th Company, 6th Regiment, sick. While in the back of the lines, their rations, particularly the bread, received a “shelling of mustard gas,” as Private Warren R. Jackson recalled: “Every man in that company thought he was going to die and was disappointed because he could not.”³⁹ Fortunately, the effects of the gas bread only lasted a few days. The environment and lack of reliable food left many Marines “cold and wet, and hungry.”⁴⁰

The Marines were not the only hungry creatures in the trenches. Lice (cooties) and rats became the bunkmates of many Marines. The Marines spent

much time ridding their uniforms of lice. Colonel Albertus W. Catlin claimed, “The cootie is as troublesome as shrapnel and he loves Red Cross knitting.”⁴¹ The men tried to rid themselves of these creatures in the trenches, such as taking a lighter or match along the seams of their uniform to burn any lice and their eggs. Sometimes, to provide some entertainment, the Marines would have “cootie races.”⁴² They would take a frying pan and make two marks with chalk in it as a start and finish line, pick two lice from their body, and bet on which would win. Once placed on the starting line, the pan would be heated to encourage the lice to hop along to the finish. The Marines “spent long hours picking lice and throwing them in a hot pan.”⁴³

It was not until around 8 May that the Marines were able to properly rid themselves of the lice. Their uniforms were placed into the Thresh-Foden disin-

³⁸ Kemper F. Cowing, comp., and Courtney Ryley Cooper, ed., *Dear Folks at Home—The Glorious Story of the United States Marines in France as Told by Their Letters from the Battlefield* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1919), 54.

³⁹ Warren R. Jackson, *His Time in Hell: A Texas Marine in France*, ed. George Clark (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 2001), 65.

⁴⁰ Byron Scarbrough, *They Called Us Devil Dogs* (n.p.: self-published, 2005), 45.

⁴¹ Catlin, *With the Help of God and a Few Marines*, 31.

⁴² Rendinell, *One Man's War*, 65.

⁴³ Scarbrough, *They Called Us Devil Dogs*, 52.

factors. These were large cylinders mounted on truck chassis that operated a steam engine in which clothing and blankets were placed. In 15 minutes, all of the lice and their eggs would be killed and the Marines could have a brief respite from the constant itching.⁴⁴

Rats, attracted to the ideal conditions in the trenches of sewage waste and the rotten corpses of men forgotten in no-man's land, were omnipresent. Many Marines awoke to rats crawling across their bodies or attempting to steal their food. Private Stewart commented that "we not only eat and sleep with the rats, but at night on watch they throw rocks at you from the parapet. They are certainly familiar."⁴⁵ Corporal Sidney B. Hill of the 79th Company, 6th Regiment, wrote home that sometimes when he was "listening on the wire for the [Germans], the rats get on it and begin to fight and for a few moments he does not know whether it is a [German] coming and whether he should throw a bomb, or fire his rifle, or just lay low." Hill also remarked, "I would hate to kill a poor innocent rat, but I would love to get a [German]."⁴⁶

Rats could grow quite large and would frequently gnaw on wounded men. Corporal Joseph Rendinell recalled: "These rats are terrible. We can't lay down without them starting in to nibble at our legs. They are nice and fat from eating dead French and Germans. Now they want American meat. Those babies will find it pretty tough, I bet."⁴⁷ Corporal Adel M. Storey, 83d Company, 6th Regiment, wrote,

Never in my life have I seen rats of such size as these are here. They don't run from us, either, like any ordinary rats does. They will fight like a good fellow when you fool with them. Where we are now there are several cats, and in the daytime they come into the dugouts and around where we are, but at night they stay out in No Man's Land. . . . But it is a fact, when everything is quiet at night around the trenches and

in the dugouts the rats are out in force and the cats take refuge in No Man's Land.⁴⁸

To combat this plague of rodents and provide some form of entertainment, the Marines often hunted the rats through the trenches. Major Robert L. Denig, 17th Company, 5th Regiment, wrote home, "Oh, yes, rat-hunting in the trenches is some sport. They run down and everyone tries to jump on them. I got a couple. The rats are worse than the [Germans]."⁴⁹ Sometimes, dogs such as Jimbo, a rat terrier who was the mascot of the 67th Company, 5th Regiment, were used to hunt the rats. But the Marines also had an aardvark that Colonel Albertus Catlin recalled "did murder rats."⁵⁰

The unsanitary conditions of trench life also made it difficult to maintain good hygiene. The constant water in the trenches led to many cases of trench foot. Marines like Private James Scarbrough, 83d Company, 6th Regiment, suffered through the condition and recalled that his "feet were already bad from the ice and cold, but now they were swollen up like bear's feet. . . . It was becoming a war with the mud as much as a war with the Germans."⁵¹ Just to get a bath, the Marines would expose themselves to hostile fire from the German trenches. Private Stewart recalled one such instance during the brigade's time in Toulon when the troops decided that a bath was worth the risk to their lives: "There was a pond there in the area out in the open and some of us got us a bath right there in the open. [The enemy] was over there about couple hundred yards away in the trenches but it was broad daylight so we weren't too scared that they were gonna come." As a precaution, they laid their rifles out on the ground around the shell hole as they bathed.⁵²

Trench life also provided them time to reflect on their homes or perhaps it forced them to in order to escape their current living situations. Stewart wrote home about one of these evenings: "We had a

⁴⁴ Derby, "Wade In, Sanitary!," 42-43.

⁴⁵ Gregory, *The Story of One Marine*, 105.

⁴⁶ "Fighting the Rats," *Tacoma (WA) Times*, 30 May 1918, 3.

⁴⁷ Rendinell, *One Man's War*, 63.

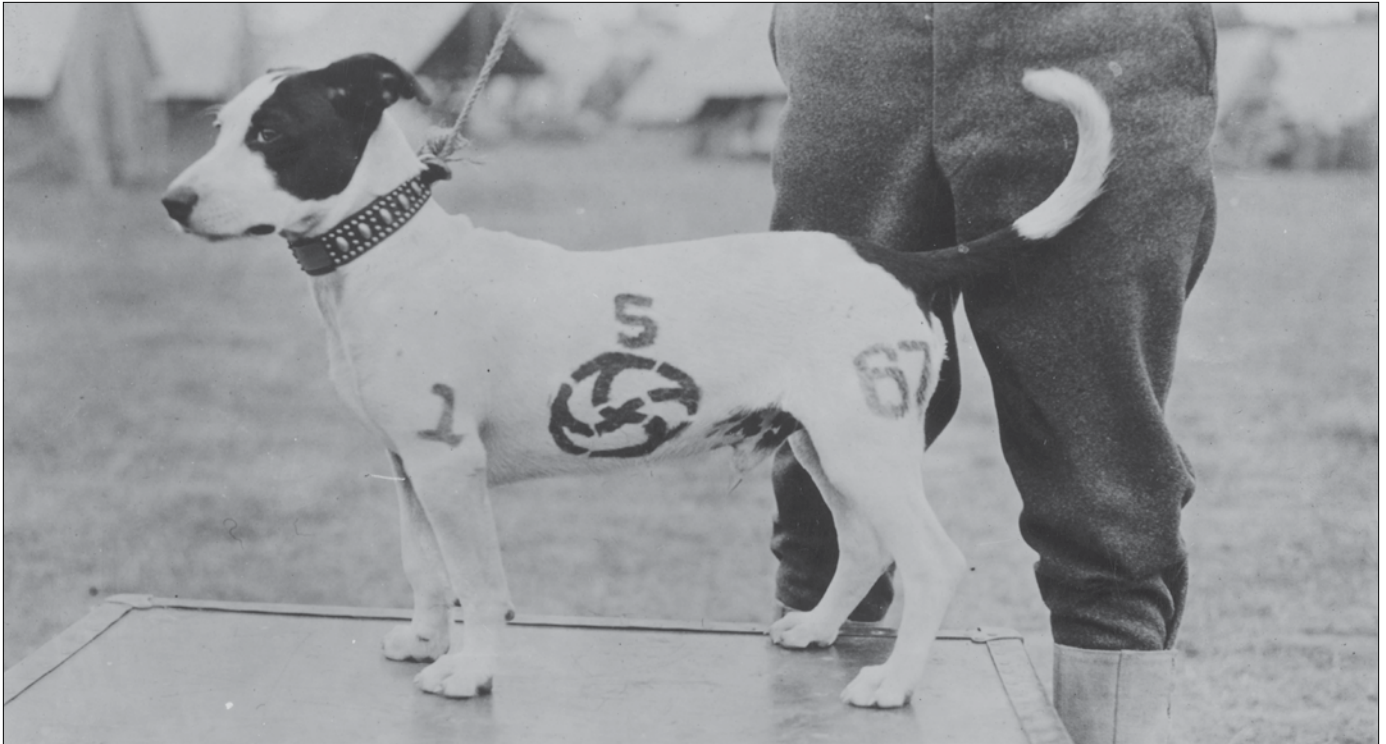
⁴⁸ Cowing, *Dear Folks at Home*, 61.

⁴⁹ Cowing, *Dear Folks at Home*, 47.

⁵⁰ Catlin, *With the Help of God and a Few Marines*, 31.

⁵¹ Scarbrough, *They Called Us Devil Dogs*, 46.

⁵² Stewart interview.



Signal Corps photograph, #2158, 111-SC-2158, Series: Photographs of American Military Activities, ca. 1918–ca. 1981, RG 111, Records of the Office of the Chief Signal Officer, 1860–1985, NARA

Jimbo, the mascot of the 67th Company, 5th Regiment. The markings on the dog are for 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, 67th Company.

good thunder and lightning storm last night, about the first we've had. Didn't seem natural not to hear the 'whistle' of the shell when you hear the crack and see the flash. Did seem more like a Kansas storm tho. My bunk is open on one side so it is sure outdoor life; last night the wind blew some but we escaped a soaking."⁵³ However, these moments of peace were periodically broken with fierce combat as the Germans tested the strength of the 4th Brigade and the 2d Division.

Combat

Adding to all of their lessons, the true test of the Marines came with the intense close-quarters combat of the trenches. The fears and excitement of the Marines after arriving in the Toulon sector are best summed by Corporal Havelock D. Nelson, 97th Company, 6th Regiment.

How would I react under machine gun
or shell fire? Would I cringe and hide,

or, worse yet, run the wrong way? If it came to hand-to-hand combat, would I have the strength and skill to parry the swiftly approaching enemy bayonet, or would I be so paralyzed with fear that the cold steel would, unhindered, find a mark in my stomach or throat? Just how did it feel to have a bayonet or trench-knife suddenly plunged into some vital spot? What would be the sensations immediately following the impact of a bullet or shell-fragment? How would the boys as a whole react? Would the military discipline born of the past few months of intensive training still hold us together as an efficient military machine

⁵³ Gregory, *The Story of One Marine*, 107.

during the heat and intense excitement of actual combat?⁵⁴

When the Marines finally arrived at the front, the sector seemed to operate under a tacit agreement between the French and Germans of “if you don’t shoot at me, I won’t shoot at you.”⁵⁵ However, the sector would not remain so quiet.

On 1 April 1918, Private Emil Henry Gehrke, 82d Company, 6th Regiment, became the first Marine killed in action in France. A German shell exploded over his working party in the woods to the rear of its position in the trenches. Shell fragments passed through Gehrke’s chest, killing him instantly. Privates Anton F. Hoesli and John R. Gabriel were severely wounded, and Private Harry R. Williams was mortally wounded and died on 2 April.⁵⁶ This loss instilled a fire within the Marines. As Colonel Albertus W. Catlin remarked, “We knew we were in the war then, in deadly earnest, and our men drew together and faced the music with a grim determination that boded ill for the unlucky [Germans] who might chance to appear within range of their rifles.”⁵⁷

On 6 April, the anniversary of the United States’ entrance into the war, the heaviest bombardment up to that point assailed the Marines. This was followed by a raid on the 74th Company at the town of Tresauvaux that did not meet any success. The Marines repulsed the attack, killing four Germans while losing one Marine and three wounded.⁵⁸

On 12 April, the 6th Regiment received its first heavy losses of the war. That foggy morning, the 74th Company was sleeping in reserve at Camp Fontaine-St. Robert, mostly in barracks in a wooded ravine. Unfortunately for the Marines, the Germans knew the

position of the camp “in Map Square 3272.”⁵⁹ Suddenly, a heavy barrage made of mostly gas inundated the area, catching the Marines in their billets before they had a chance to escape.⁶⁰ A shell “struck the roof of a building crowded with men, and the concentrated fumes filled the structure before the men were able to get their gas masks on. The shifting winds soon spread the gas to all parts of the ravine. The men were scattered through the woods for better protection, and their wet clothes readily absorbed the gas, which accounted for the serious body burns that resulted.”⁶¹

All officers were evacuated in serious condition and about 220 men were burned or had inhaled the gas. Forty of them died as a result.⁶² One of the hospital corpsmen, Pharmacist’s Mate Third Class Fred C. Schaffner, who had not been in the building, but who worked for hours over his comrades, inhaled so much gas from the men’s clothing that he died 48 hours later.⁶³ Another corpsman, Hospital Apprentice First Class Carl O. Kingsbury, also suffered from gas exposure while treating the wounded Marines, but was evacuated and spent the next three and half months in the hospital; one month of which he was totally blind.⁶⁴ Both men would become the first Navy corpsmen awarded the Army Distinguished Service Cross in World War I. The high mortality rate was nearly twice that ordinarily experienced by either the French or British. A later analysis of the shells showed this was “due to the mixture of phosgene.”⁶⁵

During the period of 17–21 April, Marines of the 96th Company, 6th Regiment, moved up to the frontline trenches. Corporal Harrison Cale remembered from this trip, “When the dawn came our men

⁵⁴ Havelock D. Nelson, “Verdun (Toulon Sector),” *Leatherneck*, December 1939, 12.

⁵⁵ Harrison Cale, “The American Marines at Verdun, Chateau Thierry, Bouresches, and Belleau Wood,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 15, no. 2 (June 1919): 183.

⁵⁶ McClellan, “The Fourth Brigade of Marines in the Training Areas and the Operations in the Verdun Sector,” 97.

⁵⁷ Catlin, *With the Help of God and a Few Marines*, 27.

⁵⁸ McClellan, “The Fourth Brigade of Marines in the Training Areas and the Operations in the Verdun Sector,” 100.

⁵⁹ 8th Landwehr Division War Diary and Annexes, 12 April 1918, in *Translations of War Diaries of German Units Opposed to the Second Division (Regular)*, 1918, vol. 1, trans. Gustav J. Braun and Trevor W. Swett (Washington, DC: U.S. Army War College, 1927).

⁶⁰ McClellan, “The Fourth Brigade of Marines in the Training Areas and the Operations in the Verdun Sector,” 102.

⁶¹ Derby, “*Wade In, Sanitary!*,” 29–30.

⁶² McClellan, “The Fourth Brigade of Marines in the Training Areas and the Operations in the Verdun Sector,” 102.

⁶³ Derby, “*Wade In, Sanitary!*,” 30. Medical personnel in Marine organizations came from the U.S. Navy. See Owen, *To the Limit of Endurance*, 33.

⁶⁴ Carl Oliver Kingsbury, *Pennsylvania War Service Record of Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines*, folder “Carl Kingsbury,” Lawrence County Historical Society, New Castle, PA.

⁶⁵ Derby, “*Wade In, Sanitary!*,” 29–30.



Courtesy of Rachel Douglass

Tresauvaux, near Verdun.

climbed onto the parapets and when they saw some Germans down by a creek washing their clothing they promptly opened fire on them. This not only brought down the wrath of the French but a raid by the Germans. Now came our long waited chance for action.”⁶⁶ The Germans brought down a heavy bombardment on the Marines and then attacked in force. The Germans barely “reached the barbed wire entanglements” in front of the American trench when the Marines “opened up such a heavy rifle fire and machine gun fire that we held them in the wire until the American artillery . . . got into action.” The barrage finally inflicted enough casualties to convince the Germans to retreat.⁶⁷

On 20 April, the 84th Company, 6th Regiment, held back a large raid while outnumbered two to one. In the middle of the night, the Germans crawled through the mud and quietly cut through almost half of the last line of barbed wire entanglements nearest the American trenches. Fortunately, the snapping of wires alerted the Marines, who quickly opened fire. The Germans, once discovered, let loose with rifle fire, flamethrowers, and grenades. Soon, Germans jumped into the trench while throwing grenades. Intense hand-to-hand combat and such a large force necessitated a barrage to push back the Germans.⁶⁸ The Marines attempted to fire the six-star signal flares four times, but they were too damp. All lines of communication had been cut off. Fortunately, more flares were found and fired, which called down a short 10-min-

⁶⁶ Cale, “The American Marines at Verdun, Chateau Thierry, Bourresches, and Belleau Wood,” 183.

⁶⁷ Cale, “The American Marines at Verdun, Chateau Thierry, Bourresches, and Belleau Wood,” 183.

⁶⁸ Clark, *Devil Dogs*, 51; and Catlin, *With the Help of God and a Few Marines*, 38–40.

ute barrage. Two Marines, Privates Earl H. Sleeth and Frank H. Hullinger, volunteered to convey the call to Mont-sous-les-Côtes to continue the barrage. They both braved the horrific German barrage falling on the road to the back of the lines but managed to make it through safely. Exhausted from his sprint through hell, Hullinger remained at Mont-sous-les-Côtes while Sleeth returned to the front with more flares.⁶⁹ The intense fire of the Marines pushed the Germans back.

During that same night, the 83d Company, 6th Regiment, also held off about 30 Germans equipped with flamethrowers and grenades. Of the flamethrower, Private James Scarbrough recalled that “in trenches, it was very effective and it caused a horrible death. . . . You’d feel the heat from a hundred yards away. . . . The smell of men burning with that gasoline vapor stays with you.” Fortunately, the Germans did not make it through their barbed wire entanglements and the 83d Company pushed them back with grenades and machine-gun fire. Once they ceased fire, a flare went up to provide light over the carnage. Private Scarbrough peeked over the top where he saw two German soldiers “hanging in the wire, dead. . . . They were all jumbled in the wire and looked like scarecrows, just shadows of men. . . . The Germans were all gone; they had all retreated out of there leaving their dead.”⁷⁰ According to the German records, “After about one hour the patrol was forced to retreat to our own trenches without having accomplished anything.”⁷¹

On 21 April, the 45th Company, 5th Regiment, held the trench line through the town of Eix. Between 0400 and 0500, the Germans laid down a barrage and a German raiding party attacked the line. Fortunately, the Marines repulsed the enemy before it reached the second row of wire. The casualties of the 3d Battalion, 5th Regiment, from the attack consisted of 3 men killed and 11 wounded. The Germans left with three officers and one private killed. The following morn-



Pvt Clarence H. Douglass, 5 April 1918.

Courtesy of Rachel Douglass

ing, several German ambulances were seen going to the rear, indicating that the losses sustained by the enemy in the raid of the previous night were quite heavy.⁷²

In the dead of night on 22 April, U.S. Army Reserve second lieutenant August L. Sundval of the 18th Company, 5th Regiment, led a patrol of 30 men into no-man’s-land. During their advance, they ran into a larger German working party “numbering at least a

⁶⁹ McClellan, “The Fourth Brigade of Marines in the Training Areas and the Operations in the Verdun Sector,” 104–5.

⁷⁰ Scarbrough, *They Called Us Devil Dogs*, 51.

⁷¹ “Raid against Villerschanze,” in “Report covering the period of April 17 to 23, 1918,” 10th Landwehr Division War Diary, in *Translations of War Diaries of German Units Opposed to the Second Division (Regular)*, 1918.

⁷² McClellan, “The Fourth Brigade of Marines in the Training Areas and the Operations in the Verdun Sector,” 103–4; and Capt Francis Fisk and Sgt Charles S. Cole, *A History of the 20th Co. 5th Regt. United States Marines* (Rossbach, Germany: self-published, 1919), 8.

hundred men.”⁷³ Unfortunately for the Germans, “the Marine does not count his enemy’s number.” A heated battle erupted in the mud wherein “rifles cracked and spat fire, and now and then a grunt told of an American bayonet that had found its sheath in a German body.” During the fighting, Sundval was wounded and as the battle lulled, Corporal Wolcott Winchenbaugh grabbed Sundval and carried him through heavy machine-gun fire back to the American lines.⁷⁴ For his actions, Winchenbaugh received the Army Distinguished Service Cross.⁷⁵

In early May, toward the end of their stint in the sector, some Marines of the 49th Company, 5th Regiment, went on a patrolling party into no-man’s-land when they “ran into a German party and the Germans shouted ‘Halte.’” The Marines dropped down “to old Mother Earth and the music started.” Despite being outnumbered, the Marines drove back the Germans and captured a wounded German officer.⁷⁶ In instances such as this, the Germans praised the Americans’ “sporting instinct” in “crawling ahead” to face the German patrols.⁷⁷

The aforementioned engagements are just some of the many fights between the Marines and the Germans that heralded their arrival in France. While not taking major losses like the battles in the following months, the Marines still suffered 513 casualties.⁷⁸ However, this varied greatly between companies depending on where they served on the front. Some units such as the 20th Company, 5th Regiment, did not suffer any major casualties and during their time

in the trenches “no action took place, and everything was quiet.”⁷⁹

Beginning on 13 May, the French began to relieve the 4th Brigade from the sector. They then traveled a long journey to about 40.2 kilometers northwest of Paris near the French villages of Gisors and Chaumont-en-Vexin drilling, maneuver training, and resting. As Private Stewart remarked of this period, the Marines were “sure hitting the ball from 5:30 to 9:30 P.M. so we think our rest billet is at the front, not the rear. But at that I haven’t heard anyone wishing for the front line. It is some relief to be out of range of the sighing Susies.”⁸⁰ This rest would not last long before they would be whisked away to stop the German advance toward Paris near Belleau Wood in June.

While not as large as the later engagements, the time the Marines spent in the trenches of the Toulon sector established them as a formidable fighting force that would thoroughly test the strength of the German Army. As Private Clifford Medine, 55th Company, 5th Regiment, stated in a letter home, the success of the Marines in the trenches “was remarkable, as we were new to the game and nearly all the fighting was hand-to-hand business.”⁸¹ The men of the 4th Brigade upheld the reputation of the Corps and earned their accolades. Many examples of heroism were undertaken around Verdun. Some of these were recognized with medals, while many acts of personal bravery unfortunately went unacknowledged.

Acts of Valor

Several Marines were awarded medals for their valor while at Verdun. For instance, on 17 April a force composed of French soldiers and Marines of the 5th Regiment successfully launched a raid out of Eix, near Demi-Lune. For their part in the raid, Second Lieutenant Max D. Gilfillan and Sergeant Louis Cukela of 49th Company, Corporal John L. Kuhn (who was killed) and Private Walter Klamm of 16th Company, and Private George C. Brooks of 17th Company were

⁷³ Catlin, *With the Help of God and a Few Marines*, 52. The 4th Brigade had at least 90 Army Reserve officers leading Marines during the war due to the lack of Marine officers at the entry of the United States into the conflict. For more information, see Richard S. Faulkner, “Doughboy Devil Dogs: U.S. Army Officers in the 4th Brigade in the Great War,” *Marine Corps History* 7, no. 1 (Summer 2021): 5–23, <https://doi.org/10.35318/mch.2021070101>.

⁷⁴ Catlin, *With the Help of God and a Few Marines*, 73.

⁷⁵ George Clark, *Decorated Marines of the Fourth Brigade in World War I* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007), 110–11.

⁷⁶ Cowing and Cooper, *Dear Folks at Home*, 72.

⁷⁷ “Captured,” in “Report covering the period of April 17 to 23, 1918,” 24 April 1918, 10th Landwehr Division War Diary, in *Translations of War Diaries of German Units Opposed to the Second Division (Regular)*, 1918, vol. 1.

⁷⁸ George G. Strott, *Navy Medics with the Marines 1917–1919*, 2d ed. (Nashville, TN: Battery Press, 2005), 38.

⁷⁹ Fisk and Cole, *A History of the 20th Co. 5th Regt.*, 8.

⁸⁰ Gregory, *The Story of One Marine*, 113. The term *sighing Susies* was slang for a type of incoming artillery.

⁸¹ Cowing and Cooper, *Dear Folks at Home*, 54.

awarded the Silver Star Medal and the French Croix de Guerre.⁸²

Patrols into no-man's-land also resulted in many acts of heroism that went unrecognized. One such act was performed by Gunnery Sergeant Charles Thompson of the 83d Company, 6th Regiment, on 30 April. That night, Thompson took two Marines from his company, Private Edward J. Steinmetz and Private Gregory A. Dorian, on a reconnaissance patrol. The Marines discovered an abandoned set of trenches and went into them to find the enemy. During their exploration, Steinmetz slipped in the mud and fell. He "almost laughed" but when he drew breath, he found that mustard gas had begun filling the trench. Thompson "grabbed Steinmetz by the belt and hurled him topside, out of the trench." While Steinmetz gasped for breath "hoping to God the [Germans] didn't hear him," Thompson went deeper into the trench to pull Dorian out. Thompson then carried Dorian over his shoulder and led Steinmetz back through no-man's-land while dodging a German patrol. Thompson and Steinmetz recovered from their wounds, but Private Gregory Dorian died on 1 May at Base Hospital 15.⁸³

Bravery does not require a front line to be shown. Acts of valor also took place behind the lines in the Toulon sector. For example, during a bombardment of Mont-sous-les-Côtes at about 1845, on 9 April, Private Clarence S. Markham, 84th Company, 6th Regiment, was thrown to the street by an explosion. Private James E. Hatcher, 84th Company, 6th Regiment, witnessed this and, without thinking of his own danger, ran into the barrage and carried Private Markham to a place of safety. While carrying the wounded man, Private Hatcher fell to the ground, but quickly recovered and got his fellow Marine out of further danger.⁸⁴



GySgt Charles Thompson.

Courtesy of Byron Scarbrough

Accolades

These examples are just a few of the countless acts of bravery shown by the Marines during their two-month stretch in the trenches. Their sacrifice and determination helped to form the identity of hard Marines who were even harder fighters. U.S. Army major general Omar Bundy, commanding general of 2d Division, commented that the "Fifth Regiment was regarded as one of the most efficient infantry organizations in the American Expeditionary Forces."⁸⁵ On replacing Brigadier General Charles A. Doyen, Brigadier General James G. Harbord wrote of the 4th Brigade, "Your Brigade has always set a pattern of sol-

⁸² McClellan, "The Fourth Brigade of Marines in the Training Areas and the Operations in the Verdun Sector," 103.

⁸³ Scarbrough, *They Called Us Devil Dogs*, 52–59; and Dorian Gregory, Addenda Roll, July 1919, Ancestry.com. U.S. Marine Corps Muster Rolls, 1798–1958, database online.

⁸⁴ McClellan, "The Fourth Brigade of Marines in the Training Areas and the Operations in the Verdun Sector," 101.

⁸⁵ McClellan, "The Fourth Brigade of Marines in the Training Areas and the Operations in the Verdun Sector," 107.

dierly excellence, and has been a pride to us all.”⁸⁶ The Marines knew this, and expressed their opinions to General John J. Pershing during an inspection during their rest period in May. In a letter, Private Thomas L. Stewart wrote, “When we were inspected not long ago by Gen. Pershing, he asked if there were any recruits in our company. The answer was ‘No.’”⁸⁷ Only hardened Marines made up the company after their time in the trenches.

The accolades did not stop with American leadership. To the Germans, the Marines had secured their reputation as formidable enemies. According to the reports of the *10th Landwehr Division*, the Americans of the 2d Division “offered embittered resistance with their machine guns, some even with their bayonet; a great many of them died fighting heroically.” The 5th and 6th Marine Regiments “should be classed as units of a somewhat higher value in view of their picked replacements and their better training than the 9th and 23d Infantry Regiments.”⁸⁸ Marine Gunner Horace Talbot of Headquarters Company, 5th Regiment, wrote home of Verdun,

The Germans who tried to conduct raids, etc., found out that this division had no intentions of being caught napping and letting a couple of hundred prisoners fall into their hands, as the case had been in another sector held by an American division. On the contrary, all raids against us were a failure, and it was the Germans instead who left prisoners and material in our hands and failed to accomplish anything against the Second.⁸⁹

The Marines’ constant harassment and the Germans’ failure to accomplish anything of import against

them led to the creation of the most treasured nickname of the Marine Corps, “Teufel Hunden” or Devil Dogs.⁹⁰ Contrary to the popular myth, however, no evidence backs the claim that the nickname came from the Germans. The name began appearing in American newspapers by April 1918, with some articles claiming that their information came from a Marine’s letter home; yet the original source—the letter cited in the 13 April newspaper article—for this claim has not been found.⁹¹ Despite its dubious origin, the Marine Corps wore it as a badge of honor. Marine Corps publications erroneously claim the nickname came from the fighting during the Battle of Belleau Wood, but in fact, it was created during the 4th Brigade’s time in the Toulon sector.⁹² Corporal Willard P. Nelligan of 95th Company, 6th Regiment, later gave one explanation of how the Marines earned the nickname Devil Dogs.

That’s what they call the Marines down at Verdun. Here’s how we got the name: We had our patrols out every night in No Man’s Land down there, and kept pestering the life out of them until they thought they would teach us a lesson; so they sent a raiding party, two hundred and fifty strong, to take our trenches and incidentally to get some prisoners. But we cut them to pieces, and instead of capturing any of us we captured most of them. They figured it was no use trying to capture any Marines, and they then nicknamed us “Teufelhunden.”⁹³

Out of the lessons and accomplishments from the time spent in the trenches, perhaps the creation of this nickname played the largest part in the lasting impact and memory of the Marine Corps in World War I.

⁸⁶ McClellan, “The Fourth Brigade of Marines in the Training Areas and the Operations in the Verdun Sector,” 108.

⁸⁷ Gregory, *The Story of One Marine*, 111–12.

⁸⁸ “Combat Value,” in “Compilation of Statements of Captured Americans,” 4 May 1918, 10th Landwehr Division War Diary, in *Translations of War Diaries of German Units Opposed to the Second Division (Regular)*, 1918, vol. 1.

⁸⁹ “The Fifth Marines and the Second Division in the Great War,” *Fall River (MA) Daily Evening News*, 2 April 1919, 9.

⁹⁰ “Marines Now ‘Devil Dogs,’” *Perth Amboy (NJ) Evening News*, 13 April 1918, 3.

⁹¹ “Wounded Marines Were Known Here,” *New York Times*, 27 April 1918, 13.

⁹² *U.S. Marine Guidebook* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2010), loc. 302 of 3612, Kindle.

⁹³ Cowing and Cooper, *Dear Folks at Home*, 204.

The experiences of the Marines at Verdun in the Toulon sector were meant to train and acclimate them to modern warfare in France. Unfortunately, this meant that the 4th Brigade could not practice the open-warfare maneuvers the AEF depended on. The German spring offensive resulted in a longer stay in the trenches, which further belabored their lack of training.⁹⁴ Despite this, the Marines excelled in facing the challenges they encountered in the trenches. Even though Belleau Wood dominates the annals of Marine

Corps history, the time spent in the Toulon sector played a critical role in conditioning the Marines to life in the trenches, brought the first combat and casualties of the war, and established the Marine Corps as a formidable fighting force. The sacrifice and lessons learned in Toulon not only prepared the Marines for later momentous engagements but also founded the reputation that the Marine Corps continues to uphold today.

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⁹⁴ For a deeper dive into the development of Marine tactical doctrine, see Owen, *To the Limit of Endurance*.