



State of Tennessee  
Department of State  
**Tennessee State Library and Archives**  
1001 Rep. John Lewis Way North  
Nashville, Tennessee, 37179

**JOHN WILLIAMS OVERTON**  
**(1894–1918)**  
**PAPERS**  
**1911-1982**

**(THS Collection)**

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**MICROFILMED**  
**(Except for Box 3)**

## INTRODUCTION

Mrs. Robert J. Warner, Jr., of Nashville, Tennessee, donated the John Williams Overton Papers (1911-1982) to the Tennessee State Library and Archives. The materials in this collection measure 1.42 linear feet. There are no restrictions, and patrons may make copies for individual or scholarly use.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT

The John Williams Overton Papers, spanning the period of 1911-1982, and numbering approximately 152 items contain clippings, correspondence, genealogical data, maps, memoirs, military records, a newspaper, photographs, poetry, printed materials, a scrapbook, a photo album, a sketch, and tributes.

John William Overton (1894–1918), a descendent of John Overton, was a national champion track and cross-country runner at Yale University. He joined the United States Marine Corps after his graduation in 1917. Overton succumbed to wounds sustained during the Second Battle Marne in France. 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 letters from 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 former Yale classmate, Samuel W. Meek, who was with Lieutenant Overton at the time of his death on July 18, 1918. Genealogical data includes 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. A memoir by an unknown French Army Captain titled "La Cote [The Hill] 119" recounts the intense fighting for hill 119 (La Cote 119) on the western front on September 25, 1915. A French comrade presented the memoir to Overton. Included is a copy of a French military award, the Diplome D'Honneur which Overton received.

Photographs include pictures of the Overton family grave markers in Mt. Olivet Cemetery in Nashville, where John W. Overton was reinterred in 1923. Among the printed materials is a guidebook to the American military shrine at Chateau-Thierry in France.

The scrapbook is in 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, which Jacob M. Dickinson most likely compiled and presented to Overton's mother, Saidee Williams Overton. Box 3 houses 26 loose pages from a photo album, dating 1911-1912. These pages include original photographs of John W. Overton with family and friends on trips to Bon Air, Beersheba Springs, and Pulaski, River Hill, as well as the Tennessee State Fair, farm animals, pets, servants, and his home, Overton Hall. Captions accompany the photographs in the photo album; however, an additional photocopied handwritten key

further identifies the subjects of the photographs. The photo album constitutes a later addition and therefore does not appear on microfilm with the original collection.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

**John Williams Overton**

1894	October 10, born in Nashville, Tennessee, the son of Jesse Maxwell and Saidee Williams Overton
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Attended the University School at Nashville

1913      Graduated from the Hill School at Pottstown, Pennsylvania.

1913 – 1917    Attended Yale University and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree

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 to France

February 26, arrived at Brest, France

May 31, graduated at the head of his class at officers' training camp in 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  
with the 18th Company, 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment, U. S. M

buried in the U. S. military cemetery at Ploisy, France

1923 – remains reinterred at Mt. Olivet Cemetery, Nashville,

Tennessee, next to his father, Jesse Maxwell Overton

## 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

Croix de Guerre with Palm

## CONTAINER LIST

### **Microfilm Roll #1**

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#### **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 counterattack 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” (in French)
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

#### **Box 2**

Scrapbook – “In Memoriam Lieutenant John W. Overton”

#### **Box 3 (Not microfilmed)**

Photo album - Overton family and friends, 1911-1912

#### **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; must 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 reinterment of John, 8