

Joseph Thomas Smith, WWI Marine in Guam

By Kathleen Smith Javdani

Joseph Thomas Smith, my grandfather, was born at home on 11 August 1895 and grew up in Livermore, then a small town, in California. Joe's father, Daniel Alexander Smith, was born in the Sandwich Islands, later to be known as Hawaii. Joe's mother, Elizabeth Twohey Smith, was born, raised, and died in the San Francisco Bay Area.¹

Joe graduated from Livermore High School in 1913. According to family lore, his father then gave him two-hundred dollars with the statement, "This will be the last money that you ever get from me." Joe used it to attend the University of California at Berkeley and enrolled in the Naval ROTC Program.

For the next four years, Joe settled in to his studies at Berkeley. On weekends he rode a horse back to Livermore. Along the way, he stopped in Oakland to court my future grandmother, Rita Marie Lewis.

World War I had begun in Europe in 1914. The United States officially entered the war on 6 April 1917. Less than two weeks later, Joe graduated in advance of his class with a degree in Letters and Science and enlisted in the U. S. Marine Corps Reserve as a Second Lieutenant.² By May he was stationed at the Marine Barracks in Key West, Florida. By June he was with the Marine Detachment at the U. S. Ammunition Depot at Iona Island, New York.

With U. S. entry into war, policy makers felt the urgent need to send at least a token force to France at the earliest possible moment to bolster the sagging morale of the Allies. All possible Marines were withdrawn from posts including Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

This regiment was designated the 5th Marines and was among the first U. S. units to reach France, arriving on 27 June 1917. The 6th Marines and a machine gun battalion joined them to form the 4th Marine brigade to become the largest tactical unit of Marines ever assembled up to that time.³

Joe did not go to France. By June 1917 he was assigned to the USAT *Sheridan*, docked at the Marine Corps Barracks in Mare Island, California, on his way to Guam in the Pacific, one of the distant Allied outposts that needed to be maintained and protected during the war. On the bright side, Mare Island was only a few miles from Oakland and Rita. By July 1917, Joe had joined the 41st Company Marines at the Marine Barracks at the Naval Station on Guam. In April this island had been the location of the first American "shot" of World War I.⁴

The United States had taken control of Guam in the 1898 Spanish-American War, as part of the Treaty of Paris. It became the westernmost point of U. S. Territory in the Pacific and served as a station for American ships traveling to and from the Philippines, while the Northern Marianas Islands passed to Germany.

As World War I began, all the colonial powers had naval squadrons stationed in the Pacific Ocean. The Allied fleets supported the



Joe and Rita Smith

invasions of the German-held territories and destroyed Germany's East Asia Squadron. Most German and Austrian possessions in the Pacific fell without bloodshed. One exception was Guam.

In 1914 the German East Asia Squadron attempted to make its way east across the Pacific and back to Germany. The German cruiser SMS *Cormoran II* had been sent out of Tsingtao, China to search for Allied ships in the Pacific and ended up in Guam's Apra Harbor by December. The ship's captain requested coal. Guam's Governor denied the request. So, the SMS *Cormoran II*, with only fifty tons of coal in her bunker, remained in port, interned according to neutrality rules. When President Wilson declared war in April 1917, the small U. S. Naval

force tried to seize the ship; the captain wanted to scuttle the ship but was willing to surrender with his crew. The U. S. Navy responded by firing a shot over its bow. There was an explosion and

seven Germans died. The German crew members (there were also Chinese and Papua New Guineans on board) were sent to the states for the remainder of the war. The ship was scuttled to the bottom of Apra Harbor.⁵

On 12 September 1917 a cablegram arrived with Joe's probationary appointment as a regular second lieutenant. As of November, he was a first lieutenant.

In 1918 conditions on Guam were peaceful enough for Joe to arrange for Rita to join him. At the age of twenty-one, Rita was ready for a challenge. Like Joe's family, her grandparents

had lived adventuresome lives. Her paternal grandfather, Captain Francis Ward Lewis, had sailed the seas and arrived in California in 1846.⁶ So, she embarked on the 5,798 mile voyage from San Francisco to Guam.

From the news report, Joe was more than eager to greet her. According to the *Livermore Herald*, "The *Guam News Letter* for March, just received by D. A. Smith, contains the following account of the marriage of his son Lieut. J. T. Smith, to Miss Rita Lewis, formerly of this place at Guam on March 1st: At 10 a.m., March 1st, Miss Rita Lewis of Livermore, California, and Lieut. J. T. Smith were married by Father Roman in the cathedral at Sumay. Due to the fact that the wedding took place during Lent, it was very quiet, Lieut. and Mrs. Talbot

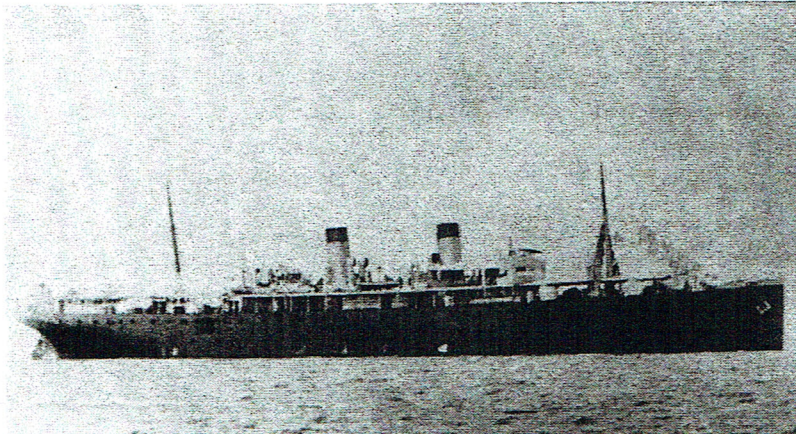
being the only witnesses.

The bride came from California on the transport Logan, which arrived the same morning. After the nuptial bonds were tied a

reception for the bride was held at the Of-

ficers' Quarters in Sumay. The guests remained to enjoy the refreshments and dance to the music of the stringed orchestra. With the rapid depletion made in the Naval Colony by detachments, etc., we are glad to welcome Mrs. Smith to our midst."⁷

As the war neared its end, the newlyweds settled into life on the island. On 6 September 1918, Joe received his temporary appointment as Captain. Soon Rita and Joe were expecting a baby, so Rita boarded a ship for the return voyage to the Bay Area and family. There she awaited the birth of their son, my father, Joseph



The German merchant raider SMS *Cormoran II*
[image courtesy of [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMS_Cormoran_\(1909\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMS_Cormoran_(1909))]

T. Smith, Jr., who was born in Oakland on 18 July 1919.⁸

Captain Joe Smith was still on Guam, where he remained until February 1920 when he returned to Mare Island. Then it was time to move again. May 1920 found Joe, Rita and little Joe settling in to life with Company "A" at the Marine Barracks at the Naval Yard in Philadelphia.⁹

Although Joe did not see much physical action during World War I, he gained valuable knowledge of the Pacific which would serve him well in the next war. During World War II, he was chief of the war plans section on the staff of General Holland M. Smith, commanding Fleet Marine Force Pacific headquartered at Pearl Harbor. Joe participated in the Marianas' campaign including the landings on Saipan, Tinian, and Guam. Then he was dispatched to Guadalcanal as a brigadier-general. As the war ended, he was in Manila as commanding general USMC logistical section on the staff of the commanding general of the Army Forces, Western Pacific. He retired as a major general on 1 November 1946.¹⁰ He returned home to Livermore and died 27 May 1965 at the U.S. Naval Hospital in Oakland.¹¹

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Endnotes:

1. Death Certificate, No. 001813936 for Elizabeth Smith, Office of Recorder, Oakland, Alameda County, California.
2. "Livermoreans Appointed Officers In Marine Corps," *Livermore Herald* (Livermore, California), 10 March 1917, p. 1, col. 1.
3. Pierce, Philip N. and Frank O. Hough, *The Compact History of the United States Marine Corps*, New York, Hawthorn Press, 1960, pp. 176-177.
4. Sources differ on this claim. This was apparently the first shot fired by the United States at the Germans after war had been declared, though a similar incident occurred in 1915, before the U. S. was officially in the war, at Fort San Felipe del Morro in what is now Puerto Rico. There, American forces fired upon an armed German supply ship that was trying to leave San Juan Bay, forcing it to return. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puerto_Ricans_in_World_War_I, and "The Odenwald Incident Under New Inquiry," *New York Times* (New York, New York), 8 April 1915.
5. Lewis, Mark. "The Cormoran II And The Tokai Maru," www.forbes.com/2009/02/11/cormoran-takai-maru-leadership_0211_warships.html, and Robert F. Rogers, *Destiny's Landfall: A History of Guam*, pp. 138-140, viewed on Google Books 13 February 2014.
6. *Sacramento County, California, Pioneer Index File (1906-1934), A-Z*, California State Library, Sacramento, California, California History Room: MICROFILM 734; Roll Number: 45.
7. "Newspaper Report of Smith-Lewis Marriage Received," *Livermore Herald*, (Livermore, California), 4 May 1918, p. 5, col. 1.
8. Birth Certificate No. 001986412, Joseph Thomas Smith Jr., Office of the Recorder, Oakland, Alameda County, California. At the time, Joseph T. Smith was still on Guam, but the birth certificate listed his stateside address.
9. U. S. Marine Corps Muster Rolls, 1798-1958 [database on-line], Provo, Utah, Ancestry.com; U. S. Marine Corps Muster Rolls, 1893-1958, Microfilm Publication T977, 460 rolls, ARC ID: 922159, Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, Record Group 127, National Archives in Washington, D. C., rolls 0122-0131, 0135, 0149, 0158, 0185, 0187, 0188.
10. "General Smith Retires From U.S.M.C.," *Livermore Herald* (Livermore, California), 8 November 1946, p. 1, cols. 4-5.
11. Death Certificate No. 001742105, Joseph Thomas Smith, Office of Recorder, Oakland, Alameda County, California.

