



## **Lieutenant Junior Grade Weeden Edward Osborne**



Weeden Edward Osborne was born on 11/13/1892 in Chicago, Illinois. Little is known of his family, though he had a sister, Elizabeth. The two young siblings were orphaned when their parents died. Weeden was taken in by the Allendale Farm and School for Boys in Lake Villa, Illinois.

Allendale was founded by Edward “Cap” Lounsberry Bradley in 1897 “to protect, rear, educate, elevate, and provide for homeless and neglected boys”. By 1901 there were five cottages, a school, library, gym, print shop, and chapel. The age when Osborne was taken in by Allendale is unknown, though one source stated it was after the turn of the century.

No record appears to exist about Elizabeth’s youth; Allendale Farm only admitted boys at the time. Some years later, Albert M. Johnson, the President of the National Life Insurance Company of the United States, headquartered at 29 LaSalle Street in Chicago, assisted in their education and support. His business address was used as the Navy’s contact point with Elizabeth. How Johnson became interested in their situation is not clear. Though Johnson was not listed as being on the Allendale board in 1919, it is

possible that his involvement came about through work with the school. A number of prominent Chicagoans on Allendale's board.

Osborne was accepted into the Northwestern University Dental School and graduated there in 1915. Johnson's support was probably particularly important during this time, since dental school and the equipment each student had to purchase was expensive. He joined the teaching staff at Denver University, Denver CO, and underwent his dental examinations at the National Medical School on 4/23/1917. When he joined the US Navy, his health record showed that was 68 inches tall, 150 pounds, light brown hair, fair complexion, gray eyes, with a slight build. He had 20/20 vision with moderate color blindness. Prior health history included scarlet fever. An article in "The Journal of the National Dental Association" (referenced below) stated: "Described as being slight in build, nervous temperament, bright, forceful, energetic, and of sympathetic and lovable disposition."

From U.S. Navy Records:

- 6/5/17: Enrolled with provisional rank Assistant Dental Surgeon LTJG, Class 4, Naval Coast Defense Reserve, cl 4, to serve for a period of 4 years from 6/5/17.
- 6/5/17: Accepted and executed oath of office.
- 6/6/17: To Boston Navy Yard to serve in active duty on the Naval Reserve Force until acceptance and execution of oath of office in Regular Navy.
- 6/19/17: Appointed Dental Surgeon in the Navy with rank LTJG for a probationary period of 2 years from 6/8/17.
- 7/3/17: Detached from Boston Navy Yard to Camp Burrage, Bumpkin Island, Boston for duty.
- 8/8/17: Discharged from Naval Reserve Force to accept an appointment to the Regular Navy.
- 8/17/17: Continued duty at Boston Navy Yard. Appointed regular dental surgeon. (detached 8/19, reported 8/30/17).
- 10/4/17: Osborne requested active duty with Marines in the American Expeditionary Force in France. Approved on 10/19/17. In his letter, he said: "Such work would be of great benefit to me, since it would be practical experience in field dental surgery, which, I believe is of immense value to a man in the service. In the event that equipment for overseas duty is lacking, I wish to state that I have practically a full

- equipment of my own for this service. This duty would be especially congenial to me as I am unmarried and have no dependent relatives.”
- 12/8/17: Detached to USS Alabama (detached 13 Dec, reported 18 Dec).
- 3/26/18: Detached to duty with 6th Marines
- 5/15/18: Arrived and assigned to duty with 6th Marines.

Osborne got his wish, and at the end of March, 1918, he was ordered to join the Navy staff responsible for medical care of the 6th Marine Regiment. His orders arranged transit from New York to Liverpool. Available records don't document his arrival in France, but it must have been a bit before 5/14/1918.

The 2nd Division of the American Expeditionary Forces—the AEF—included two combat infantry brigades. The 3rd Brigade was Regular Army. The 4th Brigade of Marines was composed of the 5th and 6th Marine Regiments. Navy Medical and Dental took care of the marines at the regimental level and below.

The 2nd Division departed from Verdun, where they had their first taste of combat, on 5/14/1918. They arrived in the Chaumont-en-Vexin area, northwest of Paris, about a week later. The 6th Marines medical staff was partially billeted in a chateau in the Isle Adam area by May 20th, so it was probably there that Osborne met his new commander. Osborne's papers were cosigned by 6th Regimental Surgeon, Lt. Commander Wray Farwell on May 28th. The senior dental surgeon in the regiment was Lieutenant, later Lieutenant Commander Cornelius Mack.

Osborne's arrival at his new duty station was probably very chaotic, though there is no record of his impressions. The 6th Regiment Navy medical team was still licking its wounds from a mustard gas attack on 4/13/18. The 74th Company of the 6th Marines lost 235 out of 250 men. One corpsman died and another was disabled in the rescue effort. In addition to joining a grieving and shocked command, Osborne would have been confronted with an array of US Army Medical forms to learn on arrival (the Navy used separate forms). To top it off, his dental equipment didn't arrive with him.

Like most dentists of the day, Osborne owned his own dental equipment. It is unclear what dental gear the Navy furnished at the time. Osborne's was delayed in transit, and never did catch up with him during his life. He apparently adapted to the lack of equipment by working alongside the corpsmen.

The 2nd Division was conducting exercises in preparation to back up the AEF 1st Division, which had gone into the attack near Cantigny, France. This was the first offensive action by the AEF—an opportunity to “bloody” the troops, gain open warfare experience, and prove to the world that America could fight. A stunning German breakthrough in the Chemin-des-Dames area northwest of Reims changed everything. On May 30th, the 2nd Division was turned over to a desperate French command and transferred to the Chateau-Thierry area with only hours of prior notice.

The movement of the division to their new area of operation was chaotic. The only medical supplies and equipment the 4th Brigade medical staff had was what they could cram in their twenty-four small Ford ambulances. The French promised to provide all the care beyond the regimental level: the ambulance dressing stations, field, evacuation, and base hospitals. That promise vanished in the confusion. The division was hurtling into the biggest battle in the history of the Marine Corps with no medical support—not a single hospital or operating room. And, in the midst of the pandemonium was Osborne.

A dentist without his equipment is like an infantryman without a rifle, or a surgeon without instruments. Not useless, but not fully capable, either. As the 6th Regiment medical staff set up its aid station at Petit Montgivrault Farm, a short distance from Belleau Wood, it appears that Osborne worked more as a medical corpsman than a dentist. When the 4th Brigade went on the offensive on 6/6/1918, he volunteered to work with the 96th Company. Doctors and dentists didn’t work at the company level—only corpsmen. He didn’t have to do it. He could have stayed at the aid station.

Captain Donald Duncan led the 96th Company, 2nd Battalion, 6th Marines. The French commanders ordered the 2nd Division to attack across a broad front at 1700 hours that day. The company rushed to its step-off position minutes before H-hour. The preparatory barrage ended as Duncan’s men formed their lines and began to advance down a long rolling wheat field toward the town of Bouresches, eight hundred yards to the northeast. The field was quiet for the first few minutes of the company’s advance. Then the Germans hit them with machine gun fire, followed by artillery. Duncan continued forward, waving his marines on in the attack. Then, Duncan fell—a terrible abdominal wound. Osborne and a corpsman rushed to Duncan’s side. First Sergeant Sissler and

Sergeant Sheridan who were with Duncan helped carry their fallen captain to the cover of a copse of trees where an aid station had been set up. An artillery shell hit them as they treated Duncan, killing Osborne, the corpsman, and Sissler. From his citations, it sounds as though Osborne had pulled several wounded marines from the field before Duncan was hit.

Osborne and others were buried near the site where they died. His body was disinterred on 10/22/1922. The examiner found the identification disk (dog tag) for Private John P.S. Thompson of the USMC 134th Co. 2nd Replacement Battalion in Osborne's breast pocket. The body was identified at Osborne, however. The examiner remarked about evidence of bullet wounds, so it is likely that Osborne was wounded before the artillery shell killed him. Osborne was reburied on 10/30/1922 in the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery (1764) in Grave 39, Row 3, Block A.

Osborne was awarded the Army Distinguished Service Cross in General Order #126. The citation states: "During the advance on Bouresches, France, June 6, 1918, he voluntarily risked his life by helping carry the wounded to places of safety and, while engaged in this difficult duty, was struck by a shell and killed." The original Army DSC medal was sent to a Navy office sometime in 1919, but the package in which it was sent was lost. Elizabeth never received the medal and requested a duplicate in May, 1919.

He was awarded two Army Silver Star citations in General Order #40 1918, Second Division, AEF. One citations stated: "For extraordinary heroism in stemming the German advance in this region and in thrusting it back from every position occupied by the Fourth Brigade from June 2nd to 11th inclusive. This northeast of Chateau Thierry (France), June 2-11, 1918." The other stated: "Risked his life to aid the wounded when the advance upon the enemy of June 6th (1918) was temporarily checked by a hail of machine-gun fire. He helped to carry Captain Donald C. Duncan to a place of safety when that officer was wounded, and had almost reached it when a shell killed both. Having joined the regiment but a few days before its entry into the line and, being new to the service, he displayed a heroism worthy of its best traditions. This on June 6, 1918."

He was later awarded the Navy Medal of Honor. The citation read: "For extraordinary heroism in actual conflict with the enemy and under fire, during the advance on Bouresches, France, on June, 1918, in helping to carry the wounded to a place of safety. While engaged in this heroic duty, he was killed. He was at the time

attached to the Sixth Regiment, U.S. Marines.” The medal was awarded in accordance with the Act of February 4, 1919. The medal and citation were forwarded to Elizabeth on 10/23/1920 at her home in Long Island City, New York. She confirmed receiving the medal in a letter dated 11/11/1920.

At the time, there were two versions of the Navy Medal of Honor. The “Tiffany Cross” was designed by Tiffany & Company. This version was awarded for combat actions, while the original Navy MOH could be awarded for non-combat actions as well. In 1942 the Navy no longer awarded the MOH for non-combat actions and went back to the single, original medal.

Osborne’s other awards included the Italian War Cross and Diploma. It was not uncommon at the time for multiple medals to be awarded for the same action.

Communications between the Navy and Elizabeth were complicated by several things. Osborne had listed Elizabeth as his next of kin, with a mailing address c/o A.M. Johnson, 29 LaSalle Street, Chicago, Illinois. During that time, Elizabeth married Harry Hutchins Fisher, Jr. He served in the Navy, and over the next several years her address changed several times. Her notification of his death was delayed for these reasons.

In 1919, Elizabeth requested his remains be returned to the US for burial. In a letter dated 5/18/1921, she reversed this, and requested that he remain buried at the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery, where he remains to this time.

The Torpedo Boat Destroyer “Osborne” was dedicated and launched at the Bethlehem Shipping Company, Squantum, MA on 12/29/1919. The sponsors were Elizabeth Osborne Fisher, assisted by Mrs. Channing Cox, the wife of the governor of Massachusetts. This was authorized in General Order #518, 1920, Navy Department.

John Frederick Andrews  
Novels of the Great War

Photo # NH 99998 Sponsors of USS Osborne and their parties, 29 December 1919



Accessed on 11/27/2017 from:

<http://www.navysource.org/archives/05/pix2/0529504.jpg>

The above photo didn't include names, but it is likely that Elizabeth is the woman with the bouquet on the right.



Accessed on 11/27/2016 from:

<http://www.navysource.org/archives/05/0529501.jpg>

After the war, the village of Boursches dedicated a street to Osborne: Rue du Lieutenant J.G. Osborne.



Photo by author in 2015

In 1929, Elizabeth requested the right to pilgrimage to his grave, listing herself as his sister and his in loco parentis. The Navy reviewed the application but turned her down, stating that her claim of being his in loco parentis was not possible, since he was of sound mind and body when he entered and served in the Navy.

Elizabeth apparently died in 1934. The story skips forward to 2002, when the FBI recovered a Tiffany Medal of Honor with his name stamped on the back. The person in possession of the medal at the time attempted to sell it, which is illegal. This occurred in South Carolina. Who had it and how they came into possession of it remains unclear. Some questions have been raised about the mechanical stamping of his name on the back of the medal, where many others were more finely engraved. The medal is now in the Navy Museum. A photo of the medal can be found at: [http://www.navy.mil/view\\_image.asp?id=6972&t=1](http://www.navy.mil/view_image.asp?id=6972&t=1)

The United States Marine Corps established the Lieutenant Junior Grade Weedon E. Osborne award to recognize a Navy dental officer who made significant contributions in support of operational readiness while serving with the Marines.

The spelling of Osborne's first name is a curiosity and has been the subject of misspelling since his death. His signature on Navy documents show clearly that he spelled his name "Weeden". This was also the spelling his sister used in her correspondence about him. It is the spelling on his headstone at the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery. However, many other documents misspell his first name "Weedon". That is shown on the back of the Medal of Honor and the US Marine Corps Lt. J.G. Weedon E Osborne Memorial Award.

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## References:

Photograph from US Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, courtesy of André Sobocinski, who also provided a wealth of other US Navy records used for this biography.

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