

LEATHERNECK

MAGAZINE OF THE MARINES

19th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps TROY E. BLACK

“How we develop the
enlisted force is critical
to how we fight
in the future.”





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COVER: SgtMaj Troy E. Black, Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, stands in front of the Marine Corps War Memorial in Arlington, Va., on Aug. 19. Read *Leatherneck’s* exclusive interview with SgtMaj Black beginning on page 36. Photo by Sgt Victoria Ross, USMC. Copies of the cover may be obtained by sending \$2 (for mailing costs) to *Leatherneck Magazine*, P.O. Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134-0775.

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James Ayling

From Immigrant to a Founding Member Of the Marine Corps Reserve

By GySgt Brian A. Knowles, USMCR

Young Marines just starting their careers learn quickly that Marine Corps discipline can be harsh and that mistakes are not easily forgiven. Those who find themselves occasionally afoul of Marine Corps regulations should take heart from the career of First Sergeant James Ayling, a sea-service Marine at the turn of the 20th century, who fought in the Spanish-American War, as well as in three campaigns of the “Banana Wars.” But before he became one of the first 34 Marines to join the Marine Corps Reserve (USMCR) before the start of World War I, making him a founding member of the USMCR, he was court-martialed twice and busted in rank repeatedly, promoted to sergeant twice and to corporal at

least three times throughout his career. Even though he was once kicked out of the Corps at the explicit order of the Commandant, he somehow found his way back into the service’s good graces and eventually served 30 years.

James Ayling was born in May of 1870 in Limehouse Borough, London, England, along the banks of the River Thames, to a Scottish father and Irish mother.

He never attended school but learned to read and write. His only work before immigrating was as a baker. At the age of 22, he made his way to the United States and settled in San Francisco, Calif., before joining the U.S. Marine Corps on Oct. 21, 1893.

Records describe him as 5 feet, 10 inches, 150 pounds, with brown hair, blue eyes, and a “ruddy” complexion. He was

tattooed on his chest and both forearms. Unfortunately, no known image of Ayling exists. His first duty station at Mare Island Navy Yard, Calif., went smoothly enough with an overall service rating of “Good” and an “Excellent” character despite a long list of infractions.

Ayling’s early offenses included: talking on post; late at reveille; disobedience to orders; insubordination; breaking into a paint shop; and absent from reveille. His worst transgression, earning him 112 days restriction, was telling an officer of the day that he had permission for weekend liberty while already on restriction and staying out for three days longer than allowed. In total, during his first two years of service, Ayling was punished with 255 days of restriction, wearing double irons for 10 of those days.



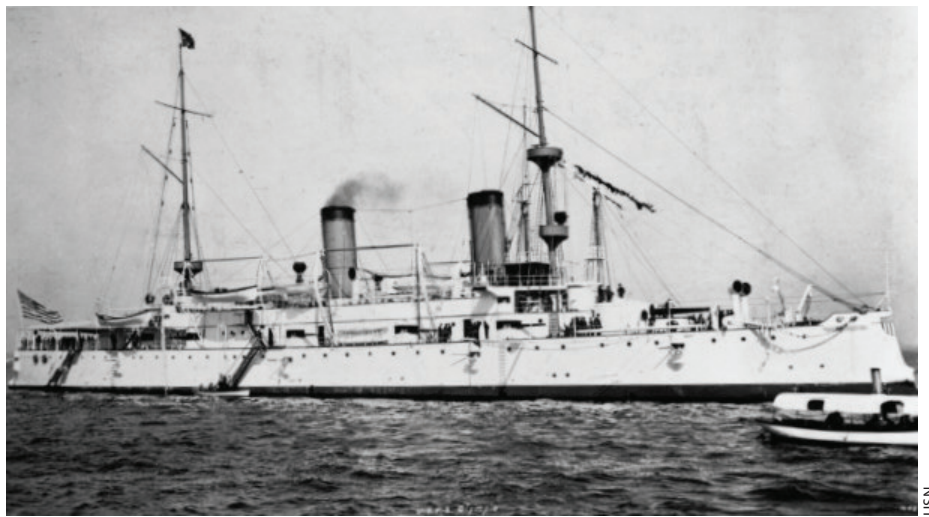
Training on transporting wounded servicemembers was conducted at Mare Island, Calif., July 1918.

Ayling's first sea tour was just as rocky and included the first of many close calls in ending his career. His first at-sea posting was aboard USS *Olympia* (C-6). *Olympia* incorporated innovative features including electrically primed gun batteries, refrigeration systems, electric lighting and forced-air ventilation. Ayling must have been fascinated by the design and technology of the ship for later in his career, he would reenlist for Reserve duty at a radio communications station. The ship also helped pioneer the use of wireless communication equipment in the U.S. Navy. Quality of life was much better compared to older vessels. As a new ship, *Olympia*, with Private Ayling in the Marine Guard Detachment, began her first operational deployment when she set out from Mare Island on Aug. 25, 1895, to join the Asiatic Squadron, fated to become notorious in the "Battle of Manila Bay" in 1898 as Commodore George Dewey's flagship.

Starting his shipboard life badly, Ayling "Refused Duty" and suffered a Summary Court Martial. Unfortunately for Ayling, punishments were more severe out at sea. He was found guilty, and his punishment was 20 days of solitary confinement on bread and water rations. On its way crossing the Pacific, the cruiser coaled in the Hawaiian Islands. While visiting Maui and Oahu, Ayling was late returning from liberty ashore and earned 90 days restriction and given a 4th Class "Bad" performance rating. *Olympia* then headed westward across the Pacific with severe weather causing repeated fires in the coal bunkers, all crew assisting in damage control. Ayling's ship nonetheless reached Yokohama, Japan, and became the squadron's flagship. The ship then cruised Japanese waters, visiting Yokosuka, Kobe and Nagasaki.

What should have been an exciting and eventful first sea tour for Ayling turned out to be a harsh experience. He was given an overall rating of "Bad" by the ship's guard commanding officer, Captain William Biddle, for his professional duties and personal conduct. Ayling's only "Excellent" rating was in sobriety. Likely, ceremonial pomp and showing-of-the-flag duties on a flagship must not have suited Ayling's motivations. The commodore, ship's captain and the captain of the Marine guard expected the best of the crew, which Ayling was not yet prepared to give of himself for the Marine Corps.

Found in dereliction of duty off Japan and discovered "Sitting on Post," Captain Biddle had tolerated enough of Private Ayling's failures and ordered him transferred. Before *Olympia* sailed on to China and Russia, Ayling was transferred back



Above: USS *Olympia* at anchor, 1899. *Olympia* was one of the most advanced ships in the U.S. Navy at the time of her commissioning. Below: Marines and Sailors of the ship's company eat at their mess aboard USS *Olympia* in 1898.



to duty at Mare Island and put aboard USS *Concord* (PG-3) for the return voyage back to the States. Oddly enough, during the two-month return voyage, Ayling was again receiving "Good" and "Excellent" ratings from the captain of *Concord*. While *Olympia* would cruise the Far East and later win victory at Manila Bay during the Spanish-American War a few years later, Ayling would fight in another major naval battle in the Caribbean.

In July 1896, Ayling's next sea duty was on the battleship USS *Oregon* (BB-3), where he found himself in trouble almost immediately and regularly thereafter. As a member of the ship's guard, things didn't improve much during his two years aboard *Oregon*. Once, he had neglected to clean his rifle, even after being ordered to, and thus failed an inspection. He was cited for a variety of offenses, both major and minor. He was repeatedly late to reveille, had a habit of shirking duty on post, and "using

foul language on berth deck." More than once, he was disobedient and insubordinate both to NCOs and officers. This earned him two days of solitary confinement on bread and water rations. He was routinely given extra duty hours and placed on restriction repeatedly for his nefarious conduct. Because of these discipline difficulties, when Ayling completed his first enlistment term, he received a discharge rating of "Good," one rating lower than the customary "Excellent."

The routine of peacetime or garrison duty has traditionally been quite different from wartime service. The focus and motivation for honor, courage, and commitment to the country created by war have certainly adjusted many Marines' attitudes throughout the Corps' history. Private Ayling, troubled as he was, soon found his motivation to straighten up his conduct and improve his performance.

In 1898, long before the Panama Canal

was completed in 1914, ships on the U.S. West Coast wanting to journey east had to sail around the entire South American continent. The lengthy and often perilous journey took more than three months. When the war with Spain began in April 1898, the Navy knew it would need its most modern battleships in the Caribbean, and so it ordered *Oregon* to fire all boilers and make for Cuba with urgent haste.

Oregon steamed from San Francisco around Cape Horn to Key West to join the North Atlantic Squadron in early May 1898—a journey of 14,500 nautical miles, completed in 66 days. She joined the U.S. blockading fleet and assumed patrolling for the breakout of the Spanish Fleet, which occurred June 3, 1898.

The speed and firepower of *Oregon*, an advanced ship for the 1890s, had earned her the nickname “Bulldog of the Navy.” The ship’s armament was four 13-inch guns and eight 8-inch guns. Her armor belt was 18-inches, but with 11,000-horsepower engines, she was propelled through the water at a speed of 17 knots, making her one of the fastest battleships of the fleet. During the Battle of Santiago de Cuba, *Oregon*, the only ship in position and with enough speed, chased down the Spanish cruiser *Cristobal Colon*. *Oregon*’s firepower and speed prevented *Cristobal Colon*’s escape and led to her run aground on Cuban shoals. Marines and Sailors from *Oregon* boarded and attempted to save *Cristobal Colon* from sinking, but she was scuttled by the Spanish crew.

For his involvement in the battle, assisting in the naval gunnery and then with the Marine boarding party, Private Ayling received the West Indies Campaign Medal (later renamed the Spanish Campaign Medal). Ayling’s service and conduct during the Spanish-American War turned the page on his disciplinary malfeasance. He did not become a model Marine just yet, but his reckless and irresponsible actions were curbed considerably.



West Indies Campaign Medal

From *Oregon*, Ayling’s first enlistment nearing its end, he was transferred to Protected Cruiser USS *Atlanta*, laid up “out of commission” at the New York Naval Yard, to await his discharge on Oct. 20, 1898. Not content to return to work as a baker and after enjoying nearly a month as a civilian, the 28-year-old Ayling reenlisted at the Brooklyn Naval Yard on Nov. 15, 1898. Private Ayling was assigned to USS *Chicago* (CA-14) Dec. 1, 1898, *Chicago* being recommissioned the same day. *Chicago* was a step down from *Oregon*. As an older protected cruiser built in 1885, *Chicago* was roughly half the size of his former ship. It was one of the first steel-hulled ships in the U.S. Navy and still had masts for sails to supplement its boilers. However, *Chicago* was the flagship of the South Atlantic Squadron, which also allowed cruising of European, Mediterranean and Caribbean waters.

Ayling was fortunate once again in experiencing some of the best liberty ports for Marines and Sailors. However, minor infractions led to Ayling serving extra duty hours and placement on restriction

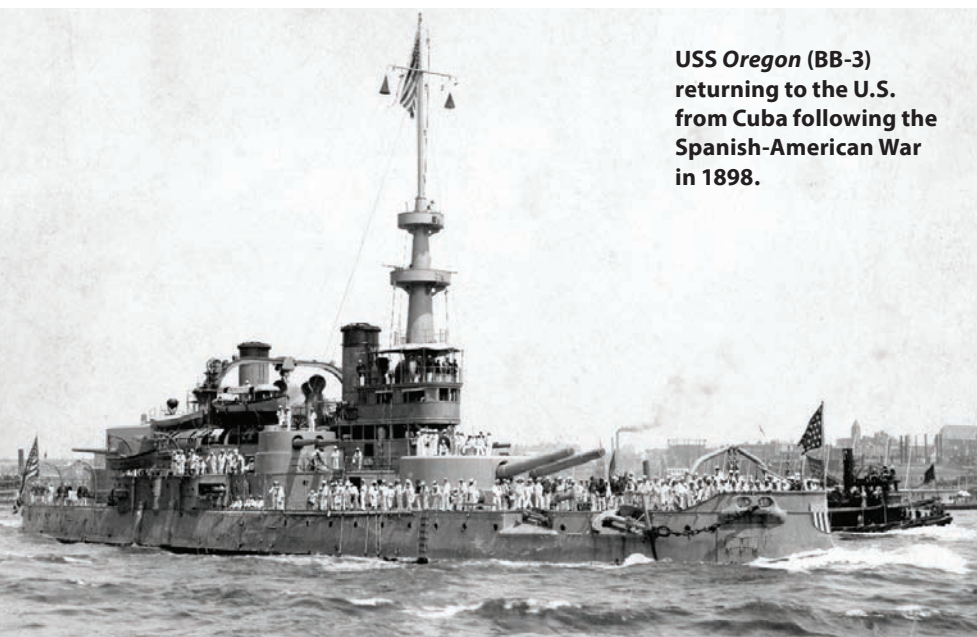
several times. The infractions: he was late to formation; disobedient to orders; late returning from liberty; and “taking water from Scuttlebutt.” Over his two years aboard ship, his performance records show he was making an effort to limit his misconduct and prove his ability. Taking water from the scuttlebutt seems an innocuous offense until one remembers that fresh water was still a precious commodity at sea in this era.

Chicago was back to New York by Oct. 2, 1899, to participate in the naval parade of ships to honor former Asiatic Squadron Commander, Admiral Dewey. A month later, Ayling’s ship was once again at sea taking station as the flagship of the South Atlantic Squadron. On July 7, 1900, the U.S. Census recorded Private Ayling at Montevideo, Uruguay, with *Chicago*.

Before *Chicago* again returned to the U.S., Ayling transferred to USS *Atlanta* on March 9, 1901. The Protected Cruiser was assigned a sea tour with the South Atlantic Station, Ayling’s second tour. Ayling quickly impressed his new superior and he was soon promoted to corporal on March 21, 1901. *Atlanta* then cruised off the coast of Brazil and throughout the South Atlantic until November of 1902, when she was transferred to the Caribbean Squadron. On Jan. 1, 1903, while aboard *Atlanta*, near Culebra Island, Puerto Rico, Ayling accidentally suffered a dislocated right knee joint. The ship’s doctor recommended a transfer to a naval hospital in the U.S. for further treatment and recuperation.

Corporal Ayling was sent to the Marine Barracks at 8th and I Streets in Washington, D.C., for recovery. Once healed, he was stationed at Marine Barracks, Norfolk, Va., in February 1903. Receiving perfect performance reviews in his assignments in the District and Norfolk, he was promoted to sergeant in April 1903 and was later transferred back to “8th and I” to await the end of his enlistment on Nov. 14, 1903. He received “Excellent” character and performance ratings.

Taking eight days as a civilian before reenlisting, the 33-year-old Sergeant Ayling signed his third enlistment on Nov. 21, 1903. Continuing his good performance at “8th and I,” he was rewarded with assignment to the “U.S. Marine Battalion World’s Fair” in St. Louis, Mo. The detachment was to participate in the 1904 centennial celebration of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, colloquially known as the St. Louis World’s Fair. John Philip Sousa led the Marine Band’s performances there as well. By May 1904, Sergeant Ayling and his Marines were providing ceremonial and security support for the fair.



USS Oregon (BB-3) returning to the U.S. from Cuba following the Spanish-American War in 1898.



COURTESY OF ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH ARCHIVE

A view of the second-floor corridor of a building where Marines rescued historic artifacts, books and documents from a disastrous fire in 1904.

Ayling's prior discipline problems were minor compared to what would come next. Whatever the reason, he did not acquit himself honorably. Beginning with failing a uniform inspection, he was confined to quarters. Things went badly for Ayling from there. The court-martial record shows that on June 25, 1904, Sergeant Ayling was found guilty for "being drunk and creating a disturbance ... at the World's Fair, St. Louis, and

being impertinent and disrespectful to an Army Officer." An intoxicated Ayling had attended the Hagenbeck Animal Show & Circus and began a disturbance. An Army officer, also in attendance, ordered Ayling to end his ruckus. Ayling's response was rude and disobedient. The public incident became an embarrassment and was reported to Marine Corps headquarters. Forced by public and political pressure, Ayling was court-martialed for his poor

choices at the World's Fair. Fortunately for the Marine Corps, the incident was not reported by the press at the highly publicized fair. Unfortunately for Ayling, he was reduced in rank to private and dishonorably discharged from the Marine Corps at the explicit order of the Commandant, Major General George F. Elliott.

Later in the year, the Marine contingent at the fair displayed great courage when they helped save irreplaceable artifacts, books and art after a museum caught fire and was all but destroyed. Occurring in the night, they rushed to the scene, lending assistance to firefighters. Unable to contain the fire, Marines continued entering the building, even as it burned, to retrieve items. Sergeant Ayling's personal conduct was less than ideal; however, his training and leadership to his Marines taught them persistence and perseverance. Ayling and the Marine Corps were proud of the Marines jumping into danger to save lives and property.

Ayling's whereabouts from July 1904 until June 1907 are unknown. We can



COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES

A Marine band leads the procession into Forest Park and through the fairgrounds during the Dedication Day Parade at the 1904 World's Fair, St. Louis, Mo..

assume that he stayed in St. Louis, as he would later reenlist from there. Likely, he gained employment during the World's Fair and continued writing his petitions for reinstatement to the Commandant for a second chance with the Marine Corps.

After three years, in June of 1907, Ayling's request for a waiver from the Commandant to reenlist was approved. His sergeant rank was reinstated as well. The circumstances of his high-profile dismissal from the service were not forgotten but overlooked due to the need for experienced Marines. Ayling had to hit bottom with his dishonorable discharge

before he could straighten himself out, although his bad behavior had not yet run its full course.

Back in the good graces of the Corps, he was ordered to Mare Island and then to sea-duty aboard the Armored Cruiser USS *South Dakota* (ACR-9) through 1908. Apparently, his prior conduct of mischief and misdeeds helped him become an excellent ship's police sergeant. He would regularly perform outstandingly in his duties with naval gunnery and police duty throughout the rest of his career; however, he still had ongoing issues with obedience to orders and his sobriety.

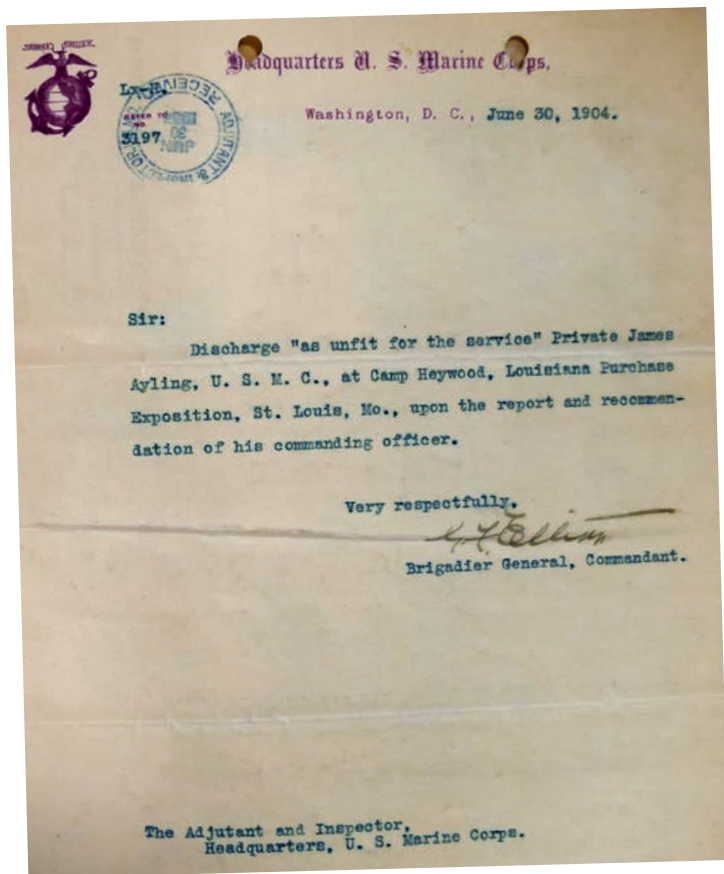
In December 1908, he was transported on Auxiliary Cruiser USS *Buffalo* (AD-8), arriving in February 1909, to Marine Barracks Puget Sound Naval Yard, Wash. Ayling's vices would catch up with him while there. An event during liberty nearly destroyed his career once again. On May 6, 1909, the report read, "Scandalous conduct tending to the destruction of good morals and discipline. Recommended to be reduced in the rank of Private." A further recommendation was made for another dishonorable discharge.

No details are known of what the "scandalous conduct" entailed, but regardless, Ayling was again at the mercy of the Commandant to judge his fate. On May 22, 1909, he was reduced in rank to private and given an immediate transfer to Marine Barracks Sitka, Alaska, by order of Commandant Elliott.

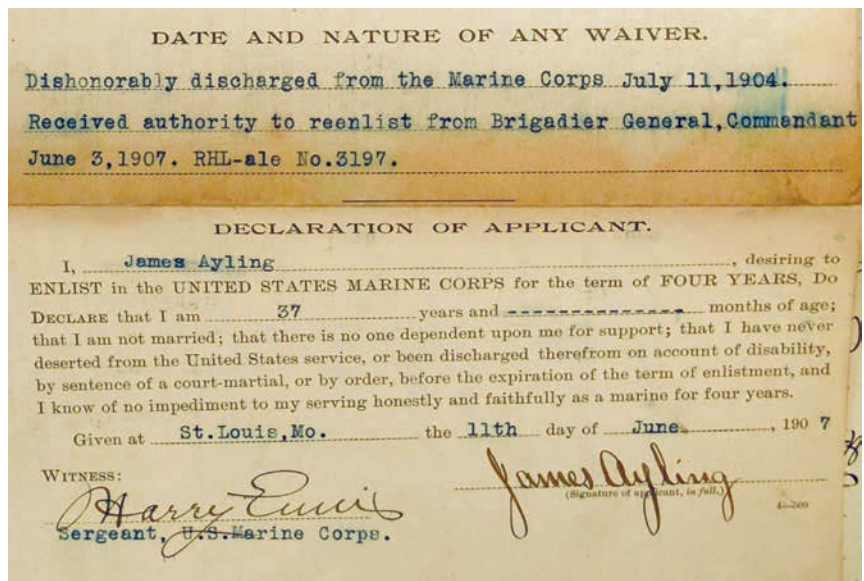
Ayling had barely arrived in Sitka and had just been given a temporary appointment to corporal when his rebelliousness and trouble with alcohol got to him again. He was again "reduced to Private for being unfit and unworthy to hold the rank of an NCO." A week later, he was found to be under the influence of liquor when returning from liberty, and luckily, received only a warning and a transfer to sea duty. Commenting on men stationed in remote garrisons, a Naval squadron commander once remarked, "Men who do not get drunk are not plentiful in the Navy or Marine Corps." Private Ayling spent June of 1909 on his best behavior and by the end of the month, he was returned to Puget Sound to await a sea duty assignment.

Ayling wouldn't wait long. On Sept. 20, 1909, he was stationed on USS *Washington* (ACR-11). Needing an experienced NCO on the ship's guard detachment, Private Ayling was reappointed again as a temporary corporal. He kept focused and well behaved throughout 1910 with *Washington* stationed with the North Pacific Squadron. Back at sea in early 1911, *Washington* next sailed for Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, assigned to the Caribbean Squadron. By January 1911, Ayling was a sergeant again, with a temporary warrant this time. On June 11, 1911, while *Washington* lay at anchor in Guantanamo Bay, Ayling reenlisted once again.

By this point, Ayling was an expert gunnery NCO and found himself transferred quickly between ships to impart training to Sailors and Marines. These were choice sea-duty assignments aboard some of the biggest ships in the Navy. He went from *Washington*, on July 13, 1912, to USS *Nebraska* (BB-14). Then, on July 20, he was transferred to USS *Illinois* (BB-7). On Dec. 16, 1912, he was sent back to *Nebraska* for transit to Marine Barracks



Left: BGen Commandant George F. Elliott's letter discharging Sgt Ayling, "as unfit for the service," after an incident at the World's Fair in St. Louis, Mo., June 30, 1904. Below: BGen Elliott later provided a waiver for Ayling to reenlist after being court-martialed.





Visitors crowding the grounds at the World's Fair on "Pike Day," St. Louis, Mo, June 4, 1904. (Courtesy of *The Atlantic*)

Boston, Mass., serving there from Dec. 30, 1912, until February 1913.

On a short tour of duty, February to April 1913, during one of the many "Banana Wars" interventions the Marine Corps was employed to reconcile, Ayling conducted police duties ashore in Cuba, maintaining peace and deterring insurrectionists. In November 1913, Ayling's detachment was renamed Company D, 2nd Advanced Base Regiment and returned to Boston. A month later, in December 1913, his company was sent to Pensacola, Fla., in response to the building tensions and possible war with Mexican revolutionaries. Repositioned to Culebra, Puerto Rico, Ayling readied his men for combat and a possible landing on the Mexican coast.

In April of 1914, Sergeant Ayling, along with hundreds of Marines gathered from ship's detachments of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet, participated in the seizure of Vera Cruz, Mexico. Along with Ayling were a number of far more famous Marines: Colonel John A. Lejeune, Colonel Littleton W.T. Waller and Major Smedley Butler. The attack on Vera Cruz was in response to an ongoing revolution in Mexico, which threatened political and economic relations with the U.S. and further destabi-

lization of Mexico. President Woodrow Wilson received approval from Congress to intervene and ordered the seizure of the port city and interception of weapons shipments, severely weakening the illegitimate rebel leadership.

The street-fighting that occurred after landing was new to Ayling and the Marines, requiring considerable adjustment in tactics. Marines and Sailors garrisoned the port for several months until relieved by U.S. soldiers. The Marine expedition and all other U.S. forces that landed in Mexico were withdrawn by November 1914. However, Sergeant Ayling's direct participation in the Vera Cruz fight was short for on the first day of the engagement, he was seriously injured when he fell from a ladder while attempting to climb the roof of a building during a skirmish. He was safely evacuated and soon recovered. In September 1914, he was promoted to first sergeant (temporary warrant).

The beginning of 1915 found 1stSgt Ayling with a transfer that took him back to his old ship USS *Oregon*, assigned to the Pacific Squadron and based at San Diego, Calif. The aging vessel was showing her wear and age. As such, she was

limited to patrolling along the Pacific Coast. On June 14, 1915, while aboard *Oregon*, Ayling signed his fifth enlistment contract.

Ayling was headed back into combat while assigned to the 29th Company, having been transferred in February 1916. In June 1916, they shipped by rail to the Port of New Orleans, La., with the rest of the 4th Marine Regiment to board the troop transport USS *Hancock*. They shipped out for the Dominican Republic to restore order and provide protection from insurgents.

When a revolution broke out on the Caribbean island nation, Ayling landed with the 29th Co on June 21, 1916. Marines were to occupy, administer and reform the country. Marines also prevented use of the country by Germany as a base in which to attack U.S. shipping and destabilize other Central and South American nations. Ayling was under fire in multiple engagements throughout June and July of 1916. Deployed in small units to suit the mountainous jungle terrain, he marched his detachment from Monte Cristi to Santiago. He fought hostiles at Las Tricheras (June 27), Dona Antonia (June 28-30), and Guayacanes (July 3).

For his leadership and dedication, he was authorized a permanent warrant to his first sergeant rank on Dec. 24, 1916. Ayling, fighting in his last Banana War, would help create garrisons, train local police and continue patrols until Jan. 5, 1917. He was then transferred to the Brooklyn Naval Yard. Only in 1924 were U.S. forces finally withdrawn from the Dominican Republic, with a new government established to maintain peace and a new treaty agreement recognized.

Upon his return to the U.S. in early 1917, First Sergeant Ayling learned the Marine Corps had just created a Fleet Marine Corps Reserve (FMCR). At the age of 47 and with 21 years of service, he was likely considering retirement and pursuit of civilian opportunities. The Reserve offered him an option to both serve and pursue a career and family. He decided it was time to leave active service for the Reserve. He reenlisted to the FMCR on March 1, 1917. Soon after, he took a job as a New York City policeman.

The Marine Corps was aware of the severity of the “Great War” in Europe, raging since 1914, and knew they were not prepared if the U.S. would get involved. Creation of a Reserve would provide experienced NCOs and ready Marines to quickly increase the Marine Corps’ expeditionary forces. However, founded only on Aug. 29, 1916, the Marine Corps Reserve was just counting its first three dozen Marines when the U.S. declared war against the Central Powers in April of 1917.

The Corps had global commitments to maintain with roughly 14,000 Marines in 1916. These included ship’s guard detachments, counter-insurrection police actions and naval base garrison duties. Even if fully mobilized, the Corps could not hope to engage on the grand scale of the Western Front campaigns. A Marine Corps Reserve would provide the manpower to solve the wartime expansion if time allowed for the many thousands to be recruited, trained and organized. Eight months from creation to declaration of war brought just 34 Marines into the Reserve, hardly a drop in the bucket to fulfill its mission.

Recruitment into the Reserve ranks continued with all personnel immediately going on activated orders. The Inactive (Drilling) Reserve was mobilized out of existence during the war. By war’s end, more than 10 percent of the Marine Corps

consisted of Reserve Marines. Of the 72,000 total Marines within the Corps, there were 7,456 Reserve Marines on muster rolls by December 1918. This included 269 female Marines, who could only serve on Reserve enlistments. The Reserve had grown by 21,929 percent from the founding 34 Marines.

Ayling was successful in his Reserve duties and helped the USMCR to fulfill its function of creating trained and ready

mobilized for a critical Active service posting in early 1918.

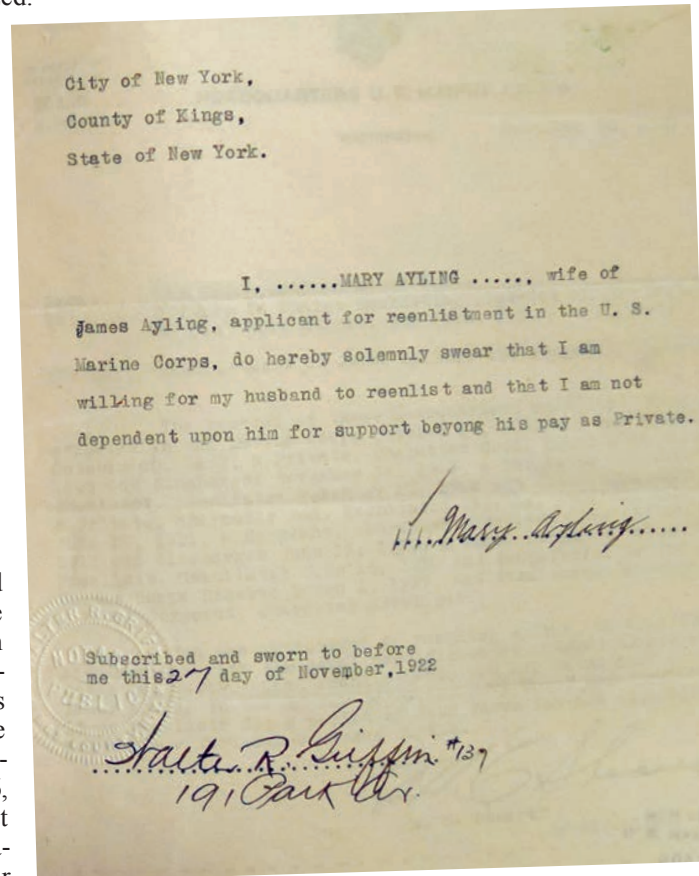
Activated from the Reserve on April 9, 1918, Ayling was assigned to the Naval Radio Station at New Brunswick, N.J. He assumed his first sergeant duties to administer and train the Marines of the station. The wireless transceiver station was the primary radio communication link between the United States and Europe throughout the war. The communications technology must have reminded Ayling of his time on *Olympia*.

The war ended on Nov. 11, 1918, and the demobilizations began soon after. However, given the need for his experience and administration abilities, Ayling was kept on active service until July 21, 1919. Once demobilized, he was returned to the Eastern Reserve District in New York City but continued first sergeant duties at the Naval Radio Station in New Jersey as an attached Reservist.

Just after the war, Ayling met and married a single mother of two, Mary Cornwell, on Nov. 10, 1921. Mary, her son (Francis) and daughter (Anna), and Ayling would buy a home on Washington Avenue in Brooklyn to settle down. As the home was just a block away from the Brooklyn Naval Yard, the sights and sounds of service life were never far away.

By November 1922, all Marine Reserves were demobilized; 90 percent of the Corps’ wartime strength had been discharged. As a highly seasoned, “salty” Marine, Ayling knew how he could continue to serve his adoptive country after the war. He provided strong leadership to his Reserve Marines and continued to set an “Excellent” rating example with his performance. However, with demobilization complete, potential recruits looked to civilian employment instead of the military, especially in the very slim budget years of the 1920s. During this time, drills were voluntary, and only the two-week annual training was paid. On Nov. 23, 1922, Ayling’s five-year Reserve enlistment ended. He would reenlist one last time on Dec. 1, 1922, to temporary active service for the Reserve at the Brooklyn Naval Yard. His wife Mary was required to provide her written consent and acknowledgment of the financial hardship and stresses of a military spouse for the reenlistment to proceed.

On March 1, 1923, after three months



Sgt Ayling’s wife, Mary, consenting to her husband’s reenlistment to the Marine Corps, Nov. 27, 1922.

Marines to support and augment wartime expansion of the Corps, which is similar to the Reserve’s primary directive today. From the beginning, the Marine Corps Reserve was fulfilling its intended purpose. The modern mandate clarifies the mission as preparation and readiness of Marines for wartime support of the active component, augmenting and reinforcing Active forces for employment across the spectrum of crisis and global engagement.

Receiving an “Excellent” performance rating in his Reserve status, 1stSgt Ayling served at Marine Barracks, New York City, throughout 1917. He assisted in recruitment, training and retaining Marines with prior wartime service and signing new recruits. The Eastern Reserve District kept Ayling as a recruiter, administrator and senior advisor until he was

of active service, by Ayling's request, he was returned to Inactive (Drilling) Status. Commandant of the Marine Corps, Lieutenant General John Lejeune, approved the request. Returning to civilian employment, Ayling assumed a position as a bank clerk.

The Marine Corps believed the Reserve had delivered very efficient and useful service during the war. Future conflicts would require similar contributions. Ayling understood the importance of the Reserve and remained one of the few to support its existence. Notwithstanding best efforts to retain combat-experienced Marines and recruit new members, by June 30, 1923, the entire Marine Corps Reserve would dwindle to a mere 579 Marines.

Public Law 512, passed by Congress in February 1925, reinvigorated the Marine Corps Reserve with greater organization, funding and status. Many senior officers and NCOs of World War II owed their continued service to the Reserve. With this solid footing, the Reserve would not only endure but develop into a true Reserve Component that would ably support the Marine Corps through World War II, Korea and Vietnam, and throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. At the Brooklyn Naval Yard, First Sergeant Ayling would continue his support and provide leadership, helping

to set the fledgling USMCR toward becoming a renowned organization.

Finally, on May 15, 1926, the 56-year-old James Ayling retired as a first sergeant from the Marine Corps Reserve after 30 years and 10 days of combined service in the active and Reserve components of the U.S. Marine Corps. General Lejeune wrote to Ayling for his retirement, "You have served your country long and faithfully, and your record is a credit to yourself and to the Marine Corps. This office extends a sincere wish that you may have every happiness in your well-earned retirement."

Ayling and his wife lived happily at their home in Brooklyn. To supplement his retirement pay, he rented rooms of the house. In 1943, James Ayling died of stomach cancer in New York City at the age of 73. He was provided full military honors in his funeral and burial. He was interned at Holy Cross Cemetery, Brooklyn, N.Y.

As one of the first Marines to join the Reserve before the "Great War," we can proudly call 1stSgt Ayling a Founding Reservist of the Marine Corps Reserve. Even with his brazen conduct as a young Marine, perhaps exactly because of his troubled record, Ayling represents a turn-of-the-century sea-service Marine. A young immigrant who went looking for

his place in the world often found himself in trouble but eventually proved himself through service and dedication. Ayling followed his path as a Marine to represent the U.S. in liberty ports around the world, maintained high standards of naval gunnery and military police, contributed to victory in naval battle at Santiago de Cuba, fought an amphibious landing at Vera Cruz and trained Marines and secured communications in World War I. Although, for the Marine Corps, his most outstanding achievement and legacy was to continue his duty and support the Marine Corps Reserve during a time of struggle and reformation as a component. All Reserve Marines can be proud of 1stSgt James Ayling as a founding member of the USMCR.

Author's bio: GySgt Brian Knowles serves as the communications strategy and operations chief for Marine Forces Reserve, Communication Strategy Office. He has served in the USMCR since 2001. His former historian duty stations include U.S. Africa Command and Marine Corps History Division. In his civilian employment, he works for the U.S. Air Force as Wing Historian, 434th Air Refueling Wing, Grissom Air Reserve Base in Indiana.



Are You Ready?



Angela Maness
Sr Vice Commandant
Sooner Detachment #559
Oklahoma City, OK



Laura Brown
Adjutant / Paymaster
Alamo Detachment #315
San Antonio, TX

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Young Marines

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