

Lost At Sea

The *Montauk* was an old vessel by the time Frank Stewart first saw it. It had been built in Kennebunkport, Maine way back in 1880, seventeen years before Frank was even born. By the time the Navy acquired the ship, it was nearly forty years old.

By contrast, the first class of cadets had entered Clemson College less than twenty-five years before Frank Stanton Stewart arrived on campus in 1917. Stewart, from Simpsonville, enrolled as a member of the Class of 1921. We don't know how long Stewart remained at the young college, but he makes no appearance in *Taps*, the student yearbook, and by the next year, as events will show, he was serving in the Navy.

Following the declaration of war on Germany in April of 1917, Clemson's senior class famously volunteered their services en masse to President Woodrow Wilson. But the senior weren't the only Clemson men to don uniforms. Stewart joined the Navy and was assigned to the 6th Naval District headquartered in Charleston.

With America now in the fight, the Navy suddenly faced the prospect of protecting the United States' two thousand mile Atlantic coast. To assist with this mission, the Navy purchased existing ships, including one from the Fisheries Products Company of Wilmington, North Carolina. Placed into federal service, the one hundred sixty-one ton vessel was designated the *Montauk*, SP-392. Due to its age, *Montauk* was assigned coastal minesweeping duties and was based in Charleston.

Seaman Second Class Frank Stewart was one of the twenty-four man contingent aboard *Montauk* as she patrolled the southeast coast. On August 20, 1918, *Montauk* was caught in a fierce gale while cruising off the northeast coast of Florida. The gale, possibly part of a category I hurricane that would slam into North Carolina four days later, lashed the ship, eventually swamping its engine. Soon after, the anchor parted, leaving the ship—and its crew—at the mercy of the merciless storm.

The winds and waves drove the ship toward the shore of Cumberland Island, Georgia. Aground and in danger of coming apart in the pounding waves, the crew abandoned ship. Seventeen crew members reached shore; seven others—including Stewart--were lost in the breakers.

Frank Stanton Stewart was just twenty-one years old when he was lost at sea. His body was never recovered.

