



**State of Tennessee
Department of State
Tennessee State Library and Archives**

Robert Frank Hodge World War I Papers, 1914-1919

COLLECTION SUMMARY

Creator:

Hodge, Robert Frank, 1893-1919

Inclusive Dates:

1914-1919, bulk 1917-1919

Scope & Content:

Consists of clippings, identity cards, ration cards, leave passes, loose photos, two journals, military records and orders, a map, and a photo album, all compiled from Hodge's time in France from 1917-1919.

Shortly after the United States joined the war in 1917, a call was directed mainly at college men to join the American Field Service (AFS) as part of Sections Sanitaire [Etats-] Unis (SSUs). Hodge joined the 36-man unit being recruited from the University of the South (Sewanee). Once in France, they became SSU 558.

The journals are believed to have been written by David Van Alstyne Jr., the commander of SSU 558.

The first journal begins in August 1918. This journal lists the members of SSU 558 and their service information. Other notes on additional pages account for gasoline purchase and usage and car repairs.

The second journal begins in October 1918 and ends a few days after the Armistice. Van Alstyne records when the unit transfers to a new city or village and his responsibilities and actions during these two months. On the way to St. Quentin, he passes part of the remains of the Hindenburg Line saying, "not hardly a home standing in the villages and shell-holes, some as large as 25 feet across and 15 deep overlapped each other in places." On October 24, he writes of being transferred to the tank corps and that Lt. Pardee will replace him. As clerk, Hodge is responsible for transferring the property and money of the unit to Pardee. In

Petit Verly, Van Alstyne traded with German prisoners for iron crosses and other souvenirs saying, "The Boches were perfectly content to part with them for a sack of Bull Durham [tobacco]."

The photo album contains approximately 80 pages of black and white photographs (presumably taken by Hodge himself), postcards, tickets, passes, and other items he collected. Some documents were removed from the album to be better preserved and stored flat. The photos do not seem to be in chronological order. They document SSU 558's time in France.

The map is hand drawn and shows the circulation route of the Ambulance Service in a small area of Northern France, near Amiens.

The military documents include a personnel list, a unit travel itinerary, and a report on the activities of the SSU 558 as a whole. The personnel list includes information about the soldier's military grade, civilian occupation, class, date of recruitment, date of birth, and home address. The military travel itinerary documents the movements of SSU 558 once in Europe. It provides information about where the company was stationed, when they arrived, and when they departed. The military report provides a summary of the services of SSU 558. The report was issued in late December 1918.

Overall, the contents of this collection give researchers insight into the American Field Service, their support role with the French Army on the Western Front, and the group of men from Sewanee that became SSU 558.

Physical Description/Extent:

1 cubic foot, 1 boxed photo album, 1 oversized folder

Accession/Record Group Number:

2018-002

Language:

English
French

Permanent Location:

XIV-L-6

Repository:

Tennessee State Library and Archives, 403 Seventh Avenue North, Nashville, Tennessee, 37243-0312

Administrative/Biographical History

Robert Francis (Frank) Hodge was born July 7, 1893, in Chattanooga, Tennessee. His parents were Benjamin E. Hodge, a grocer, and Helena G. Hodge. He had two siblings; his sister Edna and brother Benjamin. Familiarly known as Frank, he attended Chattanooga High School where he played football. After graduating, he attended the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee, pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree. He was also a member of the glee club, the German club, and the Alpha Tau Omega (ATΩ) fraternity.

Shortly after the United States joined the war on the Allied side, the French high command requested 6,000 volunteer Americans to man field ambulances on the Western Front. That call was directed mainly at college men, initially from Ivy League and eastern universities, to join the American Field Service (AFS), an American volunteer ambulance corps under the French Army. In May 1917, while still a student at the University of the South, Hodge joined the 36-man unit being recruited from Sewanee. Once in France, the AFS was divided into smaller sections, forty men with two drivers per car, called Sections Sanitaire [Etats-] Unis (SSU). Hodge and the other Sewanee men formed SSU 558, in which he served as a private and clerk.

While the Americans arranged their travel to and from France, the French Army furnished gas, rations, and gave them the regular pay of French soldiers. Much of their work consisted in driving and doing maintenance on the Ford Model Ts, Fiats and “camionettes” (little trucks) that had been converted to ambulances. Though the unit was at various times in 1917-18 posted to the Somme sector, Verdun, and Chateau-Thierry, there was much “down-time.” Their heaviest action came on August 10-14, 1918, in support of a French offensive near the Somme sector. Hodge was employed in all-night triage work and ferrying wounded from the front lines to field hospitals. Several members of SSU 558 received Croix de Guerre medals from the French Army for this action.

SSU 558 was originally organized at Versailles in June 1917 under the number 61. By August 1917, it had joined the 42nd Division of French infantry at Verdun and helped evacuate 3,100 wounded. The unit was “en repos” (behind the lines) most of October 1917 and new personnel were brought in. In November, the section was stationed at Villers en Haye with advanced posts in St. Jacques and Madieres. In January 1918, the section was changed to number 558.

After the Armistice was signed and the war officially over, Hodge stayed in France until 1919. He returned to Chattanooga, Tennessee, and built a career as a drug store and pharmacy owner. Hodge died June 4, 1975, at age 81. He is buried at Forest Hills Cemetery in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

David Van Alstyne Jr. was born January 3, 1897, in Louisville, Kentucky. While a student at Williams College, Van Alstyne joined the ambulance corps and

became commander of SSU 558. He was then transferred to the United States tank corps in October 1918. At the end of the war he was awarded the Croix de Guerre. After returning from Europe, Van Alstyne finished his Bachelors of Arts degree in 1920 at Williams College and worked as a salesman and businessman. He was elected to the New Jersey State Assembly in 1942 and served until 1953. He died October 10, 1985, at age 88.

Organization/Arrangement of Materials

Items are organized alphabetically by document type.

Conditions of Access and Use

Restrictions on Access:

No restrictions.

Restrictions on Use and Reproduction:

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Index Terms

Personal/Family Names:

Hodge, Robert Frank, 1893-1975

Van Alstyne, David, Jr., 1897-1985

Corporate Names/Organizations/Government Bodies:

American Field Service

University of the South

Subjects:

Ambulance drivers -- United States -- History

Ford Model T automobile

Military training camps -- United States -- 20th century

World War, 1914-1918 -- Medical care -- United States

Geographic Names:

Chattanooga (Tenn.)

France -- Description and travel -- 20th century
Le Havre (France)
Pont-à-Mousson (France)
Rogéville (France)
Saint-Dizier (Haute-Marne, France)
Saizerais (France)
Sewanee (Tenn.)

Document Types:

Black-and-white photographs
Certificates
Clippings (information artifacts)
Correspondence
Identity cards
Journals (Accounts)
Maps (documents)
Military passes
Military records
Money orders
Negatives (photographs)
Newsletters
Notes (documents)
Orders (military records)
Poems
Publications (documents)
Ration cards
Theater programs
Travel documents
Travel guidebooks

Acquisition and Appraisal

Provenance and Acquisition:

The Robert Frank Hodge Papers were donated to the Tennessee State Library and Archives at the November 2017 *Over Here, Over There* digitization event by Mr. Hodge's great-grandchildren of Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Processing and Administrative Information

Preferred Citation:

Robert Frank Hodge World War I Papers, 1914-1919, Tennessee State Library and Archives

Processing Information:

Processing completed by Wayne Moore and Sara Horne in September 2018. Folded documents were removed from the photo album and incorporated into the folders, with notes made that they originally were pasted in the album. The photo album also received conservation work in preparation for scanning and long-term storage.

Related Archival Materials:

John A. Catlett Papers, 1863-[1917-1919]-1919, Tennessee State Library and Archives

Electronic Location and Access:

Collection will be loaded as a TeVA Collection in Fall 2018.

DETAILED COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

CONTAINER LIST

Contents/Item Title	Date	Box	Folder
Black-and-white photographs	1914-1919	1	1
Certificates -- Presidential memorial	Approximately 1975	1	2
Clippings -- The Argonne Players	Jan. 5, 1919	1	3
Clippings -- The Chattanooga News -- "U-boat tried to sink Balfour's ship"	Jan. 9, 1919	1	4
Correspondence	Undated	1	5
Identity cards -- U.S. Army Ambulance Service with French Army -- Hodge	1918	1	6
Journals (accounts) -- Vol. 1 -- David Van Alstyne, Jr.	1918	1	7
Journals (accounts) -- Vol. 2 -- David Van Alstyne, Jr.	1918	1	8
Military passes -- Hodge	1917-1919	1	9
Military personnel -- SSU 558	Undated	1	10
Military records -- Travel itineraries	1917-1918	1	11
Military reports -- SSU 558 information	Dec. 28, 1918	1	12
Military training camps	Undated	1	13
Money orders -- Hamilton National Bank to Banque de Nancy	Jan. 8, 1918	1	14
Negatives (photographs)	Undated	1	15
Newsletters -- Amerique Toot Sweet	March 26, 1919	1	16
Orders (military records) -- Sewanee Branch Intercollegiate Intelligence Bureau	May 31, 1917	1	17
Orders (military records)	1917-1919	1	18
Personal notes -- "My general orders are:"	Undated	1	19
Poems -- "David" by Izzy	Undated	1	20
Publications -- The Stars and Stripes	Feb. 14, 1919	1	21
Ration cards	1917-1919	1	22
Theater programs -- "Tournée Chanteclair"	Undated	1	23
Travel documents	1917	1	24
Travel guidebooks -- Amiens	Undated	1	25
Photo album	1917-1919	2	
Map -- Ambulance routes through France	Undated		OV 1