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## An American Ambulance Driver in France during the Great War The Lasting Memory and Relationship between Harry N. Deyo, the Men of Section 591, and French Civilians

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An American Ambulance Driver in France during the Great War  
The Lasting Memory and Relationship between Harry N. Deyo, the Men of Section 591, and  
French Civilians

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in  
History

by

Melanie S. Gaumont

B.A. Southeastern Louisiana University, 1983

May, 2020

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## **Abstract**

This thesis presents the experiences of Harry N. Deyo, a graduate of the University of Michigan, who volunteered to serve in the United States Army Ambulance Service in France during the Great War. The friendship between Deyo and the drivers of Section 591 lasted throughout his lifetime. These friendships were important to his life; they were a way to share common bonds and to remember the war in the context of camaraderie and affection between themselves and the French civilians who cared for them. The role of rural French civilians and the relationships formed with the American ambulance drivers is also explored. Studies of collective memory and remembrance evidence the bond shared among these distinctive groups of people. This thesis argues that the relationships between the men of Section 591 and the French civilians they encountered were unique experiences and had lasting effects long after the end of the war.

Keywords: World War I; United States Army Ambulance Service; ambulance driver; France; memory; relationships

## Introduction

Harry N. Deyo, a 1917 graduate of the University of Michigan, was a volunteer in the United States Army Ambulance Service (USAAS) during the Great War. His unit, Section 591, was embedded with the French Army in France from June 1917 until April 1919. The life and military career of Harry N. Deyo serve as examples of an American dedicated to his country, his comrades, and the civilians affected by the war in France.

Deyo collected memories. His experiences during the Great War are preserved in a collection of personal photographs and artifacts. The Harry N. Deyo Collection tells the story of Deyo's experiences through the lens of his camera and the artifacts he preserved from his time in France. Among the many artifacts included in the collection are a photograph album, twenty-five editions of circular bound letters from the members of Section 591 called *The Jubicourt Matin*, letters from French civilians, military citations, commendations, and newspaper articles.<sup>1</sup> These artifacts provide a personal narrative of Deyo's thoughts, impressions, and feelings throughout his service in France.<sup>2</sup> Deyo again served his country in the United States Army Reserve Officer Corps during World War II stationed with the Sixth Army.

In the Summer of 2016, Deyo's granddaughter, Carolyn Deyo, contacted Dr. Gunter Bischof, a professor in the Department of History and Philosophy at the University of New Orleans, and offered to loan the university several items belonging to her grandfather. Her father had recently moved from his home in Ohio and rediscovered these artifacts in the attic. Not able to move them to his home in Florida, he gave them to his children. They, in turn, thought that these artifacts would be of interest to the University. Upon receiving the first box, nine in all, the

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this thesis, the spelling of *Jubicourt* changes. The spelling used by each writer will be the spelling that is used in the thesis.

<sup>2</sup> Many of the articles in the collection are newspaper clippings that are undated. The articles were stored together in manila folders.

faculty integrated some of the artifacts into the curriculum of graduate classes. A photograph album consisting of over one hundred photographs and many other mementos of interest became the first of these artifacts to be introduced to students. Over the last three years, many items from the collection have been accessed by professors and students. A World War I Public History graduate class at the university developed a website containing exhibits of Deyo's digitized photographs, maps, the use of cameras in the Great War, the development of photography, and the importance of new technology and machinery. The album's assorted photographs found on the website, <http://worldwaronememory.omeka.net>, provide support for the lessons and activities to be used by teachers and students in their further study of the Great War. The website also contains links to museums, battles sites, monuments, and further reading. It is a valuable source for elementary, high school, and college students conducting research on the Great War and its influence on American ambulance drivers and French civilians.

The Harry N. Deyo Collection has been featured at several events within the Department, as well as at university lectures and displays. Through the generosity of Carolyn Deyo and the Deyo family, Harry N. Deyo's artifacts from both World Wars have been deeded to the university in the name of Carolyn's late son, Jonathan Deyo Lumpkin. It is archived permanently in the Earl K. Long Library at the University of New Orleans. This valuable collection chronicles the experiences of an American ambulance driver, his unit, and their interaction with French civilians during the war.

As a reflection of his esteemed service in the Great War, Private Deyo received the French Croix de Guerre.<sup>3</sup> The commendation states, "Harry N. Deyo, 9224, Pvt., 1<sup>st</sup> cl. Section

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<sup>3</sup> The War Department announced the list of recipients of the Croix de Guerre in a booklet published on April 26, 1919. It states that the recipients of the medal, under the provisions of the act of Congress approved July 9, 1918 (Bul. No. 43, W.D., 1918), are authorized to wear the decoration or ribbon on their Army uniform according to uniform regulations. The date that Deyo received his medal is unknown.

591, Ambulance Service French Croix-de-Guerre with gilt star under Order No. 12,424 'D' dated December 20, 1918, Gen. Headquarters, French Armies of the East with the following citation: A driver of remarkable courage and dash. He requested to go to the most dangerous first aid station during the hectic combats from Sept. 3-14 1918, knowing that his life during that period would be in constant danger."<sup>4</sup> The Harry N. Deyo Collection is proof that this remarkable man not only served his country and the people of France with courage and determination, but also valued them as life-long comrades.

This thesis focuses on the experiences of Pvt. Harry N. Deyo during the Great War. It will argue that the relationships between the men of Section 591 and the French civilians they encountered were unique to their experiences and had lasting effects long after the war.

### **Images of Memory**

Memory served as an important component of the war for the men of Section 591. Deyo's photograph album is an important source of his memory of the Great War. He captured over one hundred images during his short time in France.<sup>5</sup> The images found in the album depict his larger memories of everyday events and struggles while performing his duties as well as those of the lighter moments experienced with his comrades and the rural French civilians.

Michael Roper of Essex University recounts the compelling narrative of a young soldier in the Great War and the changes in the accounts of that narrative over time. Roper suggests that remembering is a way for men to search for ways of feeling the raw emotions of death and

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<sup>4</sup> "The Detroit Free Press." Detroit, Michigan. September 25, 1931 Folder 23 Box 6 The Harry N. Deyo Collection, The University of New Orleans. New Orleans, Louisiana. 2019. Hereafter, to be referred to as THNDC.

<sup>5</sup> Details of the actual number of photographs taken by Deyo are unavailable. A small number of negatives were found inside the photograph album. It is unclear as to the reason why these particular photographs were preserved and displayed in the album. These photographs range in size from 2x2 to 2x4 inches and capture the everyday happenings of Deyo's experiences in France.



destruction during combat. He states that individual experiences of war are always framed within public narratives of soldiering.<sup>6</sup> The historiography of memory and war grew from the vast research compiled on the events of the twentieth century, especially regarding the World Wars. David Taylor's explorations of the problems associated with the collection of memory are outlined using psychology or cognitive therapy. Taylor defines autobiographical memory as one that is composed of three levels: lifetime periods, general events, and event-specific times. The process in which a current memory becomes a long-term memory is not fully understood. He points out that memory is stored in various parts of the brain and are fallible. Current research points to the idea that one's recollection of what happened in the distant past is extremely detailed, but recollections of the immediate past are less clear.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, a detailed recollection is not a guarantee of its accuracy. Traumatic or "flash-bulb" memory can result from momentous events and these vivid memories can provide a framework for autobiographical memory narratives.<sup>8</sup> The Harry N. Deyo Collection, as well as the artifacts from other World War I veterans, contains many examples of "flash-bulb" memory.

Maurice Halbwachs, the first professor of sociology at the University of Strasbourg in France, was a French philosopher and sociologist credited with developing the study of collective memory. He argued that collective memory is constructed through the actions of groups and individuals in the light of day; he stated that memories are both individual and private. Individuals remember, but it is through memory that it becomes "memorable."<sup>9</sup> When people comment on their own personal past, they bring with that discussion their broader social

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Roper, "Re-Remembering the Soldier Hero: The Psychic and Social Construction of Memory in Personal Narratives of the Great War," *History Workshop Journal*, No. 50 (Autumn 2000):183.

<sup>7</sup> David Taylor, *Memory and the Great War, Memories and Narratives of War* (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 48-49.

<sup>8</sup> Taylor, *Memory and the Great War*, 53-54.

<sup>9</sup> Leonard V. Smith, Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *France and the Great War 1914-1918* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), 160-161.

experience. Halbwachs states that in this way the memories are “socially framed.”<sup>10</sup> Memory, then, is only complete in a social setting.

Jay Winter, a retired member of history from Yale University, is the foremost current scholar on memory in the twentieth century “memory boom.”<sup>11</sup> He identifies two time spans of memory: the first generation of memory lasted from the 1890s to the 1920s and focused on the formation of identities, in particular, national identities. The second type emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as a result of the memory boom of World War II and the Holocaust. Winter differentiates between the terms collective memory and collective remembrance. Collective memory is the remembrance of actions by groups of people coming together for a purpose. Collective remembrance points to the time, place, and evidence which allow others to see the past through their experiences.

Winter states that memories of war are a part of the thread of a family’s history. The Great War is kept alive through the retelling of stories and genealogy. The war also has been found to have strengthened the bonds of the family.<sup>12</sup> The strength of family ties is seen in the letters from Deyo to his mother and fiancée during the war. History and memory overlap and are braided together to shift and discern the past. Historical remembrance is the term Winter uses to refer to the acts and practices of groups of people who come together to remember historical events and upheavals. Winter suggests that the “memory boom” of the twentieth century will continue to discern the events of the past and their significance on the future. The Harry N. Deyo Collection is a form of historical remembrance which continues to influence our view of the Great War today.

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<sup>10</sup> Jay Winter, *Remembering War The Great War between Memory and History in the 20th Century* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 18.

<sup>11</sup> Winter, *Remembering War*, 22.

<sup>12</sup> Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 41-42.

The camera is a valued technology of memory. Matthew Brady used the first cameras to record the brutality and anguish of the Civil War. Photographs reveal the perceptions of the photographer. This perception is the significance of Deyo's photograph album. Through the over one hundred photographs in the collection, Deyo brought history and memory together.

The development of photography into a national interest caused the camera itself to become better suited to the amateur. The camera's use in wartime had the ability to capture life in an unusual circumstance and to preserve those images as a true representation of the happenings of war.<sup>13</sup> By the beginning of the Great War, Kodak had developed a "vest pocket" model that would fit into the pocket of a military uniform. The convenience and low cost of this type of camera made it popular among soldiers during the Great War. This camera created larger negatives; however, the shutter speeds were relatively slow, which required the photographer to have a steady hand and adequate light. Without these factors, the quality of the photographs was poor. The prints generally measured three by two inches, but could be enlarged.<sup>14</sup> The camera turned nature into art and recorded the accurate details of a subject. Photographs replaced drawings to illustrate books and magazines. Wildlife photographer A. Radclyffe Dugmore, regarded the camera, "as a recorder of facts... is of great scientific value, *for it cannot lie*, and it records in an unmistakable form every detail presented."<sup>15</sup> The camera replaced the eye as a keen observer which made it possible to capture minuscule details concealed from normal view.

Photography in the early 1900s had become prevalent in American society. Albert Knox Dawson co-owned Brown & Dawson, which began in 1912 as a photographic firm. He worked

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<sup>13</sup> Jay Winter. *Remembering War*, 101-102.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher McDonald. "Lens on the Great War," *Illinois Heritage* 16, No. 6 (November/December, 2013): 38.

<sup>15</sup> Finis Dunaway, "Hunting with the Camera: Nature, Photography, Manliness, and Modern Memory," *Journal of American Studies* 34, No. 2 (August 2000): 211. A. Radclyffe Dugmore was a Welsh-born pioneering American naturalist and wildlife photographer, painter, printmaker, and author. He wrote and photographed during his service in the Great War.

for the media, advertising and travel agencies, and real estate companies. During the First World War, Underwood & Underwood hired him to take still photographs which were circulated widely in the American press in 1915–1916. Dawson began his career as a cameraman for the local newspaper, the *Vincennes Western Sun*, where he made his mark in news photography, later delivering pictures for various magazines and newspapers. Dawson traveled to Europe to document the Great War on film. For a while Dawson used a Graflex, but he found this type of plate camera too difficult to carry while riding on horse-back at the front. He mostly used a 3A Autographic roll-film Kodak, a compact and popular model widely used at the time by amateur photographers.<sup>16</sup>

Army regulations did not prohibit the use of cameras during conflict. Therefore, soldiers became the amateur photographers of the Great War. Fortunately, many of the volunteers of the United States Army Ambulance Service had access to a camera. They documented the scenes of war; those of the pleasant countryside as well as the horrors of battle. Time periods of *en repose* as well as those of drivers at work and play document the everyday life of ambulance drivers. These drivers' private collections give insight into the emotions and psyche of the individual as he endured life as an ambulance driver in France during the Great War.

Environmental historians have noted that nature is an “important actor” in human history.<sup>17</sup> Their histories of particular regions have studied the interactions of people and the natural landscape that they inhabit and the changes that are made to their environment over time. Many of the photographs taken by the average soldier during the Great War depict scenes of French farmlands, towns, and villages that had been destroyed by the ravages of war.

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<sup>16</sup> Ron van Dopperen and Cooper C. Graham, “Film flashes of the European front: The War Diary of Albert K. Dawson,” *Film History, Art, Industry, Technology* 23, No.1 (2011), 20-21.

<sup>17</sup> Finis Dunaway, “Hunting with the Camera: Nature, Photography, Manliness, and Modern Memory,” *Journal of American Studies* 34, No. 2 (August 2000): 207-212.

Photographs of the ruins of important buildings and churches bring to the forefront the misery of war as it pertained to the people and nature of France. The novel, *One Man's Initiation 1914-1917* by John Dos Passos, concentrates on a negative theme of destruction. Dos Passos gives an impression of the war as seen through the eyes of Martin Howe, the main character, whose grim descriptions display the stark reality of the pointlessness of war. Howe, an ambulance driver, describes a road that they must travel to bring men to the hospital on a particular run in gross detail, "Long rutted roads lettered with shell-cases stretching through the wrecked woods in the yellow light:... Torn camouflage fluttering greenish-grey against the ardent yellow sky, and twining among fantastic black leafless trees... Along the roads... dead mules tangled in their traces beside shattered caissons, huddled bodies in long blue coats half buried in the mud of the ditches."<sup>18</sup> His grim descriptions display the stark reality of the pointlessness of the war. Photographs taken by Lieutenant Walter Hamilton Lillie also bring to light the life of ambulance drivers in Albania and France. His prints expose the culture of the people he meets as well as the sadness of the circumstances of war and its effect on the people and the countries he encountered.<sup>19</sup> His view centered on the adverse effects of the war through the use of artillery, high explosives, and scarring casualties of military occupation.

In contrast, many of Deyo's photographs emphasize the beauty of nature and the life of rural French people. Deyo recorded much of his experiences of the war through photographs taken while he was stationed in France. His captions of the photographs are humorous at times and give little hint of the brutality of the war. In Deyo's album, the photographs of the ravaged landscape lay beside photographs showing the beauty of the French countryside. These black

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<sup>18</sup> John Dos Passos, *One Man's Initiation – 1917* (Columbia, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014), 67.

<sup>19</sup> The photograph album in the Collection of Walter Hamilton Lillie is archived at The National WWI Museum and Memorial in Kansas City, Missouri. Lt. Lillie served as an ambulance driver with the Armee d'Orient, SSU No. 10, 76Regt. 2me Armee-20e Division, Verdun from 1916 to 1918.

and white scenes provide a gentle glimpse of war. His photographs portray the everyday life of the men of Section 591 and their bond of friendship. Deyo's photographs illustrate the camaraderie between the ambulance drivers of Section 591. The drivers are photographed with their ambulances and even with their mascot, a dog named Fiat. The drivers are smiling in the majority of the photographs and appear to be relaxed and well-rested.



*Figure 1 The Men of Section 591*

These photographs also include images of war-torn France and village life. Many of the photographs place the drivers with men, women and children of the villages who appear to be proud to pose for a photograph. Several photographs depict lunch in a garden with drivers and “angels in white” relaxing together as if at a family picnic.<sup>20</sup>



*Figure 2 Angels in White*

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<sup>20</sup> Deyo's captions identify these “angels in white” as the nurses who cared for the wounded. THNDC.



*Figure 3 Angels in White-- Lunch and Play in the Garden*

There are also several photographs which give insight into the destruction of France during the Great War. There are many images of destroyed churches, buildings, towns, and villages. Deyo's photographs illustrate this destruction in a picturesque manner. The captions relate the name of the town or building, but do not concentrate on the devastation. Therefore, the impact of the destruction is not the focus of his album or memory; it is merely another photograph of interest as he travels throughout the country.

The photographs in the Harry N. Deyo Collection also give his perception of the scenery of France while he was stationed there. He states, "[I] was under the weather for awhile and away from the sector, during which time I saw a lot of France. [I] Was in Paris a couple of weeks, and also down in Nice, which is a noted resort on the Mediterranean. Visited Monte Carlo, which is in the little kingdom of Monaco ... I also went to Menton and walked to the Italian border ... Marseilles is a very interesting place. On its waterfront at night."<sup>21</sup> Each of these photographs serves as Deyo's recollection of the ambulance drivers of Section 591 and their experiences. The images reveal the drivers' true experiences of the war, their reflections of the French countryside, and their fond regard for one another.

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<sup>21</sup> From a letter to George Meyers which was published in a newspaper article. The article is undated and the newspaper is not identified. Folder 30, Box 5, THNDC.

## The United States Army Ambulance Service

A journalist coined the term World War I long after the end of the conflict. Most people during the war, especially the British, referred to it as the Great War. The French assigned the term *la Grande Guerre*, the Italians, *la Grande Guerra*, and the Germans, *der Weltkrieg*.<sup>22</sup> No matter what the name, the war was a critical event in history that had ramifications for the entire world over the next fifty years.

Woodrow Wilson's belief in "our traditional isolation" steered him away from "entangling alliances" that were occurring in Europe in the early 1900s.<sup>23</sup> On August 4, 1914, he declared that the United States was, and would remain, neutral.<sup>24</sup> However, the events which occurred from 1915-1917 of the sinking of the *Lusitania*, the British food blockade, and the resumption of unrestricted German submarine warfare finally persuaded President Wilson to abandon his desire for "peace without victory."<sup>25</sup> The United States declaration of war on April 2, 1917 was sudden and decisive. The nation's entry into the Great War challenged the military, which at the time lacked the men and training necessary to enter a war. In April 1917, only 300,000 men served in Federal Service. Over the course of the next nineteen months, more than 2,000,000 Americans volunteered for service in the Great War. Medical Corps Colonel Edward Lyman Munson wrote that the, "individual incentive to use arms largely needs to be created as well as the molding of individual ideas into a community of thought and purpose."<sup>26</sup> In addition, the lack of training manuals, instructors, and other necessary equipment caused the United States

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<sup>22</sup> Jay Winter, Geoffrey Parker, and Mary R. Habeck, *The Great War and the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 13-14.

<sup>23</sup> J. A. Thompson, "Woodrow Wilson and World War I: A Reappraisal," *Journal of American Studies* 19, No. 3 (1985): 329.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Dunar, *America in the Teens*(Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2016),156.

<sup>25</sup> Thompson, Woodrow Wilson and World War I: A Reprisal, 329.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas M. Camfield, "Will to Win--The U.S. Army Troop Morale Program of World War I," *Military Affairs* 41, No. 3 (October, 1977): 126.



to be unable to send troops quickly to assist the Entente cause in Europe.<sup>27</sup> Total war required mobilization of troops, industry, agriculture, transportation, and the development of medical and scientific improvements.<sup>28</sup> The country was ill prepared for such a task in April of 1917.

Europeans and Americans believed H.G. Wells' slogan, "The War That Will End All Wars," to be a true description of the conflict. Despite such reassurances, the Great War had high costs in personnel and supplies for the Allies. Military estimates of total losses during the war amounted to 11.9 million military personnel and 5.9 million civilians.<sup>29</sup> Additional reports estimated that another two million died from disease and six million had been presumed dead. Technological innovations such as the machine gun and chemical weapons enabled the Allies and the Central Powers to inflict devastation in Europe over a period of four grueling years of war. The horrific battles and enormous destruction in Europe showed that peace and security were an outcome that would be long in the making.

Even before America entered the Great War in 1917, war fever had begun to sweep across college campuses. Young men from middle and upper class families heard the call for volunteers to join the American Ambulance Field Service, a volunteer ambulance division developed before the war and integrated into the French Army in 1916. These volunteers paid their own way to France and agreed to a six month enlistment in the French Army earning fifteen cents per day to transport the wounded by combat ambulances from the Front to aid stations in the rear.<sup>30</sup> In June 1917, due to the rapid entrance into the Great War, the United States federalized the Field Service into the Army as part of the wartime expansion of the Army

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<sup>27</sup> Stephen J. Lofgren, "Unready for War: The Army and World War I," *Army History*, No. 22 (Spring, 1992):11.

<sup>28</sup> Camfield, "Will to Win," 125.

<sup>29</sup> John Mueller, *The Remnants of War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 40.

<sup>30</sup> [http://www.miningjournal.net/news/superior\\_history/2017/05/ambulance-drivers-of-world-war-i](http://www.miningjournal.net/news/superior_history/2017/05/ambulance-drivers-of-world-war-i) (accessed June 16, 2019).

Medical Corps. This federalization established the United States Army Ambulance Service (USAAS).

British poet, John Masefield, who served in the American Ambulance Field Service recounts, “These men [...] are men of education. They are the very pick and flower of American life, ... the greater number of them young men on the threshold of life ... All life lies before them in their own country, but they have put that aside for an idea, and have come to help France in her hour of need.”<sup>31</sup> Theodore Roosevelt also expressed his sentiments regarding ambulance drivers: “The most important thing a nation can save is its own soul - and these young men [of the American Field Service] have been helping this nation to save its soul ... There isn’t an American worth calling such who isn’t under a heavy debt of obligation to these boys for what they have done.”<sup>32</sup>

The United States Army Ambulance Service came into being on June 23, 1917, directed by War Department General Order No. 75, with the purpose of incorporating American volunteer ambulance units into the American Army in order to continue to serve at the Front alongside the French. The USAAS was composed of American volunteers in France, but the performance of duty obligations fell under the jurisdiction of the French Government. Therefore, the French army had direct control of the USAAS. Though newly attached to a French Division, each Section was, “as much a part of the division as if [they] were all born Frenchmen.”<sup>33</sup> An ambulance section was assigned to each division of the French Army. The USAAS consisted of 167 ambulance sections generally comprised of forty men strong. The administrative work of the USAAS was directed by a colonel and two lieutenant colonels. An inspector with the rank of

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/ambulanceservice.htm> 3. (accessed June 16, 2019).

<sup>32</sup> DeWitt C. Millen, *Memoirs of 591 in the World War* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1932), inside cover.

<sup>33</sup> Charles A. Fenton, “Ambulance Drivers in France and Italy: 1914-1918,” *American Quarterly* 3, No. 4 (Winter 1951): 331.

major was in charge of twenty sections. Each section included twenty motor ambulances, one two ton truck, one three-quarter truck, one five-passenger motor car and one motorcycle with a sidecar. These motorized vehicles replaced the primitive mule-drawn carriages previously used in France to transport the wounded. At the beginning of the Great War, the French army had only forty motorized ambulances, the design and make of which changed over time. The first French ambulances, the Model T Ford, could be purchased for \$360.00 FOB (Freight on Board) in 1916. It was modified to carry three stretchers or four “walking wounded,” although they often carried more. These vehicles had painted canvas walls and covers which were difficult to clean and disinfect.<sup>34</sup> Ford also designed the next model which had a wooden body. The final revision of the ambulance used in France had chassis made of fiberboard which had openings under the driver’s seat.

Another type of early ambulance had a Fiat or Peugeot chassis with a folding oilcloth or canvas pockets cut into the rear door for the stretcher handles. Several attached boxes held some spare parts and necessary tools for immediate repair on the road. The boxes also had room for gas and water cans as well as a can of oil and kerosene.<sup>35</sup> At least twenty components of the ambulance necessitated regular greasing and oiling. The drivers were expected to be skilled in the maintenance and repair of their ambulance. Learning to drive the Ford ambulances with gearless transmissions was difficult because the driver had to maneuver three foot pedals and a shift with three positions.<sup>36</sup> Possessing this skill made it beneficial for men from middle and upper classes to volunteer; they were more likely to be familiar with driving a vehicle.

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<sup>34</sup> Carol Acton and Jane Potter, *Working in a World of Hurt: Trauma and Resilience in the Narratives of Medical Personnel in Warzones* (Manchester, MA: Manchester University Press, 2015), 29.

<sup>35</sup> Byron Farwell, *Over There: The United States in the Great War* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 29-30.

<sup>36</sup> Carol Acton and Jane Potter, *Working in a World of Hurt*, 29-30.

The French Parc system, or motor pool, was important to the mission of the USAAS volunteers. The Reserve Parc, which was attached to the army, was the distribution hub for the automobile sections. The Reserve Parc handled all gasoline, tubes, tires, mail, food, and equipment requisitions and could be moved quickly as need dictated. A total of fifty new or repaired ambulances remained on hand to be requested by commanders for transportation of the wounded.<sup>37</sup> These units played a vital role in the impressive continuous service of ambulance drivers.

Each driver cared affectionately for his ambulance, as it was his home. Drivers highly regarded their ambulance, saying, “It is difficult for one who has not led the life to appreciate just what his car means to the *ambulancier*. For periods of weeks, mayhap, it is his only home. Its interior serves him as a bedroom. Its engine furnishes him with hot shaving water. He works over, under and upon it. He paints it and oils it and knows every bolt and nut, its very whim and fancy.”<sup>38</sup> Volunteers bestowed names on their ambulances because of their satisfaction with its service. Deyo named his ambulance “Old Molly” and referred to her as “Pride of My Heart.”<sup>39</sup> Old Molly served as an important part of Deyo’s daily life as an ambulance driver in France.



*Figure 4 Deyo’s ambulance, “Old Molly”*

<sup>37</sup> John R. Smucker, Jr., *The History of the United States Army Ambulance Service with the French and Italian Armies 1917-1918-1919* (Allentown, PA: William G. Schlechter, 1967), 37.

<sup>38</sup> Fenton, “Ambulance Drivers,” 332.

<sup>39</sup> Deyo does not give an explanation of this name, Photograph album, Box 3, THNDC.

USAAS volunteers may not have fully realized what they had signed-up for, but all felt the cause was just. Motivation came from male pride, patriotism, and the humanitarian ideals of youthful volunteers. These college men remained at the forefront of the war dedicated to making the world “safe for democracy.”<sup>40</sup> “The majority of the volunteers of the USAAS trained at Camp Crane in Allentown, Pennsylvania. By July 1917, the USAAS had seventy-seven sanitary squad units, the forerunners of the Medical Service Corps, embedded with the French Army.”<sup>41</sup>

### **The Men of Section 591**

The finest colleges and universities boasted the number of students who answered the call to serve their country and the citizens of France. An atmosphere of patriotic zeal existed on college campuses in April 1917. The young men on the campus of Hamline University, a Methodist-related liberal arts college located in St. Paul, Minnesota, decided to join the newly created United States Army Ambulance Service. They hoped to be the first volunteers to be sent to France. However, they spent several extra months in training at Camp Crane in Allentown, Pennsylvania, due to the necessity of continued reorganization by the United States Medical Service Corps. This delay led to the frustration of the Hamline volunteers, Section 568, at having to wait until early 1918 to join the war.<sup>42</sup>

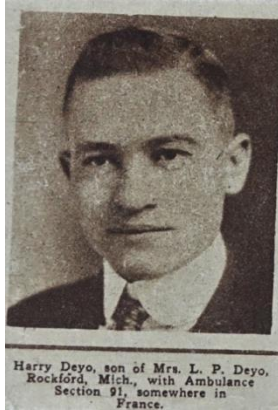
At the University of Michigan, recent graduate Harry N. Deyo volunteered along with other alumni, faculty, and students for the USAAS. Deyo was a 1917 law school graduate of the University of Michigan and one of thirty-six members of the university to volunteer for the USAAS.

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<sup>40</sup> Jack K. Johnson, “Our United Effort: Hamline University’s World War I Ambulance Company,” *Minnesota History* 3, No. 4 (Winter 2015-16): 328.

<sup>41</sup> <http://history.amedd.army.mil/booksdocs/HistoryofUSArmyMSC/chapter2.htm> 3-5, (accessed June 26, 2019).

<sup>42</sup> Johnson, “Our United Effort,” 321.



*Figure 5 Harry N. Deyo*

By the 1917 Spring semester, many students found it increasingly difficult to study as they became aware of the crisis overseas. University of Michigan professors such as William Hobbs began to lecture on the vulnerability of isolationism so much so that students became convinced of America's imminent involvement in the conflict.<sup>43</sup> William "Bill" Votruba, a member of Section 591 from the University of Michigan recalled,

that momentous occasion when we ... of the section 591 crowded into the temporary Michigan Union Shack for physical examinations and the signing up for service in WWI ... We had been sitting, or hanging around, the Union for a week or more waiting for this day - asking questions, flexing our muscles to show how good or strong we were, so I am sure not a single one was turned down by the doctors in charge as being too puny to join. After all this - we were told we could go home and wait for further orders.<sup>44</sup>

Upon receiving those orders, the volunteers walked to the train station and were hailed by cheers from the citizens of Ann Arbor while the Ann Arbor High School band played "We're Coming Over," and the Dean gave a speech at the station.<sup>45</sup> Then sections "A", "B", and "C", that is 589, 590, and 591, marched proudly to the depot.

In June 1917, Harry N. "Slim" Deyo, like many other academic men, traveled to Camp Crane in Allentown, Pennsylvania for intensive training. By the summer of 1917, over three

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<sup>43</sup> <http://michiganintheworld.history.lsa.umich.edu/greatwar/exhibits/show/military/a-world-at-war--a-campus-unfz>

<sup>44</sup> Letter to Deyo and Section 591 June 8, 1977, Folder 33, Box 6, THNDC.

<sup>45</sup> This is an excerpt from the "History of Dental Public Health in the United States" written by Kenneth Easlick, a member of Section 591. In this history, he gives a vivid account of his memories of Section 591. This book was originally published October 15, 1976, Folder 25, Box 6, THNDC.

thousand men trained to march, drill, pitch a pup tent, carry a stretcher, give first aid, and most importantly, how to assemble, disassemble, drive and repair a Ford Model T ambulance.<sup>46</sup> At Camp Crane, Deyo and the men of Section 591 began their close friendships.<sup>47</sup> Upon arrival, the men of Section 591 were given a cot and blanket and sent to sleep in the shepherders stall near the rear fence of the camp. They trained and ate together while growing into a self-sustaining unit. Dewitt C. “Clint” Millen, a volunteer from the University of Michigan, wrote in *Memoirs of 591 in World War I*, “Our first mess was beans and our first place to sleep was a pig stall three feet from the cemetery.”<sup>48</sup> The small size of the Section and their bond with the University of Michigan allowed its members to begin to develop intimacy and friendships which would sustain them throughout their service in France and their lifetimes. Millen remembers, “We went man for man. We treated each other as such, we were not drafted men. In fact, we went before the draft; some of us had passed thirty-six years of age and could not have been made to go by the United States. So you see 591 had the Great Cause at heart ... It was Get to France, Get into Action, and do our ‘Bit.’”<sup>49</sup> In June, Section 591 posed for a photograph that still depicts the intense patriotism of those young men from Michigan. *The Detroit Free Press* reported that, “Michigan Section 591, United States Army Ambulance Corps - which had just completed a seven weeks’ training at Allentown, PA - has the honor of being selected by Col. Deiles, A French officer, for immediate service in France.”<sup>50</sup> They were the first Section privileged to be chosen as members of the USAAS.

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<sup>46</sup> Johnson, “Our United Effort,” 321.

<sup>47</sup> The plethora of nicknames bestowed upon members of the military by their comrades promotes the bonds which develop among men of a section or unit. The men of Section 591 may have earned their nicknames during their training at Camp Crane.

<sup>48</sup> Millen, *Memories of 591 in the World War*, 20.

<sup>49</sup> Millen, *Memories of 591 in the World War*, 27.

<sup>50</sup> Many of the newspaper articles in the collection are not dated as they had been cut from newspapers and stored in an untitled brown envelope. This particular photograph was clipped from *The Detroit Free Press*, Folder 1, Box 8, THNDC.



*Figure 6 The Men of Section 591*

The men of Section 591 comprised a unique breed. Charles N. “Liberty Bell” Ponton described the men in his diary. He states,

Section 591 is a sad mixture ranging anywhere from Germans to a Russian Jew and our names and maps have gotten the Frenchies many hair raisers on first sight. We come from Michigan, New York, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and California but with the exception of eight, we come from the University of Michigan. We have eleven taking law, one medic, one journalist, five or six teachers, three chemists, two actors, three bankers, a couple in the mercantile business, two mechanics, two engineers and the rest are lits. When you get this bunch to arguing, each reasoning in terms of his own profession, you surely get a variety of viewpoints and you hear everything hashed over from why did you join the ambulance to when will the war be over.<sup>51</sup>

The bonds between the men of Section 591 were solidified by the time they left for France.

In August 1917, Section 591 traveled aboard the USS *Baltic* to England and then on to France. Excitement erupted on board when a torpedo from a German submarine left a small hole in the ship, which was immediately plugged up with bales of cotton. The explosion generated a shocking indication of what was to come while serving in France. The men spent time aboard ship talking about the upcoming duties of an ambulance driver, gambling, and learning French. In October, the men were assigned to the 4<sup>th</sup> French Infantry in the Avacourt sector and arrived to take the place of the Norton-Harjes Unit No. 62.<sup>52</sup> Throughout Deyo’s time in France, Section 591 was stationed in many cities, towns, and villages: Le Harve, St. Nazaire, Jubicourt, Ligny-

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<sup>51</sup> “The Diary of Charles N. Ponton Part II,” 62-63, Folder 3, Box 8, THNDC.

<sup>52</sup> Although not separated, each Section was assigned to a Division.



en-Barrois, Villers le Sac, Glorieux, Camp Frety, Ferm Dix Huit, Fortiers, Changay, Cloneveey, La Faux, Crouey, Soissons, Laon, Marle, Verdun, Fouruires, St. Amand, Subaruhneim, and Brest.<sup>53</sup> These locations provided the backdrop for Deyo's wartime experiences in France.

Deyo's en voyage experiences were similar to those of other drivers throughout France. Carol Acton and Jane Potters examine the experiences and sentiments of nurses and ambulance drivers through their letters and diaries in their book, *Working in a World of Hurt*. The drivers recount topics of "baptisms of fire and the struggle to hold one's nerves" due to the dangerous travel and devastating wounds they encountered while on duty.<sup>54</sup> Division Surgeon Richard Derby wrote in his memoir,

There were no braver or more devoted men ... After dark it was possible to bring the ambulances much closer to the line than during the daylight, although shell-swept roads, under plain observation from enemy balloons, did not in the least daunt these men. Their one idea was to keep their cars rolling, and roll they did, in and out of shell holes, over or around fallen trees, around death corners ... The work of these ambulance drivers in the forward areas required brave, cool, and daring men, and such men did the work.<sup>55</sup>

The everyday life of a driver was fraught with excitement when on duty and boredom when off duty. The ambulance driver's work was simple, but intense. He was expected to drive at night without headlights in all types of weather, on roads pocketed with craters, or through fields under enemy fire. Edward R. Coyle, a driver in France, states, "If a road is being shelled it makes passage extremely difficult for cars without light. Shell holes are 'hell holes' to get out of, not to speak of the likelihood of a broken axle. It is often necessary for one of the men on the car to get out and walk in front of it with a handkerchief behind his back so that the man at the wheel can find his way along what is left of the road, in and out between the shell holes."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Harvard Section 1, American Field Service Bulletin, 1974, Folder 2, Box 8, THNDC.

<sup>54</sup> Acton and Potter, *Working in a World of Hurt*, 62.

<sup>55</sup> Acton and Potter, *Working in a World of Hurt*, 59.

<sup>56</sup> Edward R. Coyle, *Ambulancing on the French Front* (New York, NY: Britton Publishing Company, 1918), 37.

William Gorham Rice, Jr., a volunteer driver from a prominent New York family, wrote to his parents, "All the cars are getting verdunitis [sic] from constant wear and frequent accidents ... These day duties seem the best for writing, for other days one is busy sleeping or with filthy hands working on one's car."<sup>57</sup> Schedules varied, but were a necessity to continue to transport the wounded. One driver stated, "Practically speaking there was no schedule. Sometimes we were on duty thirty hours at a stretch ... The days were bad, the nights were worse, and day or night, either on or off duty, we were always under fire."<sup>58</sup> A veteran driver at Verdun reported that his Section worked a stretch of seven days and nights and stopped only when the ambulances were no longer operable.

Often, Michigan drivers glimpsed the battlefield of the Western Front. Deyo later wrote a letter to William "Bill" Votruba recalling a particularly treacherous ride.

I feel sure you remember the night we were ordered from Poste BI to the trenches in Avacourt. We had two cars and the Fiat ahead of us pulling in near a trench, up a slight slope, had transmission trouble, rolled back and slammed us in the radiator. The four of us got the crippled car out of the way, you swung our Fiat around backed up by the trench and I got out to open the back end and get the wounded in. About this time our friends across the way apparently heard us and opened up with machine guns. Our French soldiers started shoving men on stretchers at me in the car - almost got trapped. However, we got our wounded in the car (5 stretchers) and took the other two drivers up front and made it out.<sup>59</sup>

The true experiences of an ambulance driver are reflected in the diary of Charlie "Liberty Bell" Ponton. He writes,

When not driving, which by the way is nerve racking, he is either standing or sitting around a smoke stove. If he is not wiping the tears out of his eyes, he is fighting for a place by the stove where the smoke soon overcomes him and he gives his place to the next one. Many times, we have no wood, but hug the stove just the same. Or occasionally one tries to read

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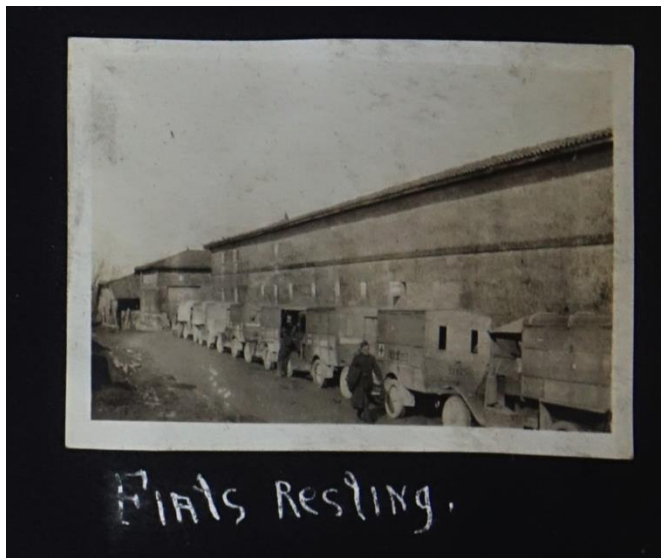
<sup>57</sup> William Gorham Rice, Jr., and George C Brown, "The Wartime Letters of William Gorham Rice, Jr.," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 64, No. 4 (Summer, 1918): 286. "Verdunitis" refers to the conditions of the roads and their effects on the ambulances during the fighting at Verdun.

<sup>58</sup> Fenton, "Ambulance Drivers," 333-334.

<sup>59</sup> A letter written by Deyo to Votruba August 3, 1975 recalling one of the many times the transportation of the wounded was difficult. This is an important letter as Deyo did not often record unpleasant times while on duty, Folder 31, Box 6, THNDC.

by the dim light of a black lantern globe, but soon gives up and contents himself to listen or talk with the other boys. Suddenly, but not unexpectedly, he is called to go on a trip. He returns too late for supper, finds there is no bed with blankets and that the fire has gone out. He now goes again back into the room and darkness ... to his ambulance and finds a few blankets, damp with the blood and mud from the wounded. He returns with them and makes his bed and sleeps.... After all this, he is fortunate if he is not called out in the night or just before breakfast. He sleeps with his cap, mittens, and many times, boots. He goes to a meal many times without washing as he hasn't a place or articles to wash with. His hands are greasy from the machine and his dishes are dirty from want of warm water or soap, his clothes are wet and muddy, his hair is uncombed and altogether he is a forlorn object to look upon. But his face, through all this, carries a wholesome and happy look which says my lot is a happy one for I am administering to the suffering ... Notwithstanding all these drawbacks, we like the life, but it is not because of the work itself, but the cause which it represents.<sup>60</sup>

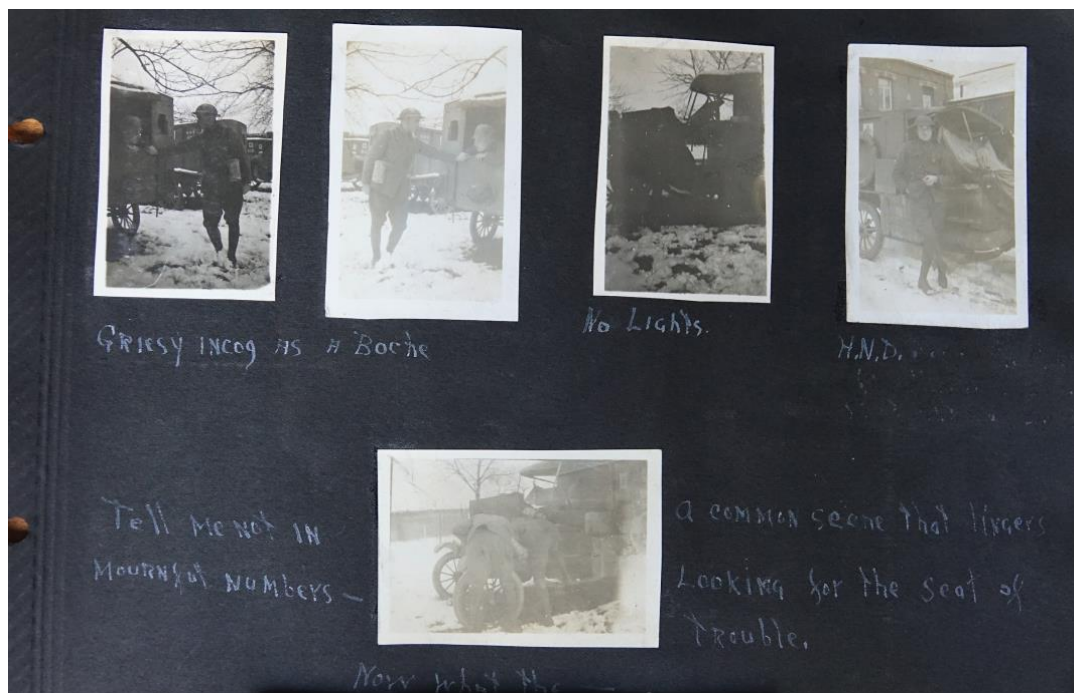
Ponton's description of an ambulance driver's purpose is at the heart of his relationship to the French and his comrades.



*Figure 7 Ambulances used by the Men of Section 591 in the French Army*

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<sup>60</sup> "The Diary of Charles N. Ponton Part II," Folder 24, Box 6, THNDC.



**Figure 8 Men of Section 591 with their Ambulances**

The Army required every form of motor vehicle to have an *Ordre de Mouvement*, or transfer order. This *Ordre*, or permit, allowed an ambulance and driver to enter and remain in a military zone. No one was allowed to be on the road without this order. Deyo's *Order de Mouvement* was issued on June 23, 1918.<sup>61</sup> The *Ordre* belonging to Conductor Deyo, Harry N. was a vital component of his mission as an ambulance driver and member of the USAAS. The *Ordre* was usually kept in a small steel envelope with other important documents in the ambulance. Deyo also carried his *Carte d'Identite* Number 705 issued from *Armees du Nord et Nord-Est in des Services Automobiles*. The card contained a photograph of Deyo in uniform, his birth date, place of birth, and rank. The instructions on the card stated, "This card will be canceled in case the owner is from duty with the French Army, relieved."<sup>62</sup>

<sup>61</sup> This *ordre* was issued to Deyo for travel from Landrecourt a Bar-Le-Duc, de Bar-Le-Duc, a Aix-Les-Bains for Permission de Détente, or recreational leave.

<sup>62</sup> Deyo's Identification Card. Each member of the USAAS was required to keep this card on his person at all times, Folder 9, Box 6, THNDC.

The men of Section 591 were the best of the best. Their dedication to the cause of saving France from the *Boche* was admirable in that the resolve needed to sustain them and protect the French was at the forefront of their mission as ambulance drivers. Their presence in France formed meaningful friendships and lasting trust among one another.



*Figure 9 The Men of Section 591*

### **Wartime Experiences of Rural French Civilians**

French civilians bore the brunt of daily life under fire during the Great War. The French, from the moment of the declaration of war, considered the conflict to be a struggle of civilization against German barbarians.<sup>63</sup> These people lived in the same towns and villages that had been inhabited by their ancestors for generations. Many lived and worked on the small and mid-sized family farms that made up most of rural France. In 1914, at the outset of the Great War, men and women lived quiet lives of industry in the beautiful countryside of France. For generations, men and women tended the farms side by side. The men worked in the fields and forests and the

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<sup>63</sup> Smith, Audoin-Rousseau and Becker, *France and the Great War*, 57.

women tended the home, gardened, and bore the responsibilities for the care of the children and animals.<sup>64</sup> France became a land of war and destruction shattering the peace of everyday life. Almost two million farmers left their homes in the summer of 1914. The remainder of the men ultimately followed as the war stretched from months to years. The agriculture battalion developed during this time period. This group was comprised of mostly women and those men too old to fight for the nation. On the eve of the Great War, French author Marcelle Tinayre, described French women's patriotism as, "not of the same nature as that of a man ... It's a sentiment ... The France of women is above all the hearth, the spouse, the child."<sup>65</sup> The women of France served as the mainstay of traditional life and the home as they played a crucial national role during the Great War.

The rural population of France managed to compensate for the absence of men by assembling the elderly, children, and those unfit for combat into a new labor force. An article in *L'Echo de Paris* described these agriculture battalions: "Whether on isolated farms or in small villages, whether on flatland or rocky slopes, plateau or valley, these brave troops are composed mainly of women, bravely aided by the elderly, the children, the disabled. Everything is done for "want of men."<sup>66</sup> A *Union sacree* formed across generations for the purpose of survival. These elderly folk who had been regulated, "to the fireside or to tending sheep," became a vital part of the survival of the nation.<sup>67</sup> Their contributions were in the form of guidance and support for the success of the farm and farm life. Rene Viviani, minister of Foreign Affairs and President du Conseil, stated in a speech to women, "At this grave hour, there is no small labor ... Take

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<sup>64</sup> Smith, Audoin-Rousseau and Becker, *France and the Great War*, 170.

<sup>65</sup> Susan Grayzel, "Mothers, Mairaines, and Prostitutes: Morale and Morality in First World War France," *The International History Review* 19, No. 1 (February, 1997): 66.

<sup>66</sup> Robert J. Young, ed., *Under Siege Portraits of Civilian Life in France during World War I* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2000), 73-74.

<sup>67</sup> Bruno Cabanes, *August 1914 France, The Great War, and a Month that Changed the World Forever* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 171.

action!”<sup>68</sup> This task was accomplished as the people of the French countryside managed to bring in the harvest of 1914 and avoid food shortages during the winter of 1914-1915. The Great War became everyone’s war.

French civilians endured the daily struggles of the Great War, especially those in villages. The presence of a foreign army which controlled their roads, trampled their land, destroyed their crops, and invaded their homes made life unbearable for those who already sacrificed their livelihoods and loved ones to the war.<sup>69</sup> Villagers near the battlefields suffered fluctuations in daily life. The villages near the front were usually the locations of evacuation hospitals where the wounded were taken after being rescued from the fighting. Ambulances constantly invaded the quiet of day and night. Ambulance drivers billeted with families throughout the village. Within hours, a small village could be overrun with tired men wanting a warm place to sleep after a horrible night run to and from the front. R.H. Mottram, a World War I war poet, described the homes of French villagers as, “the flimsy structures of peasant proprietors, most of timber centuries old, filled in with wattle and daub ...”<sup>70</sup> Ambulance drivers had various experiences billeting in small villages. Edmund P Arpin, Jr. reminisces, “... our company was quartered in the barns and buildings of a small estate ... the officers were scattered out among three or four houses in the neighborhood... I was quartered in a very fine old farmhouse ...”<sup>71</sup> Other drivers reported sleeping in houses without roofs, barns infested with rats and lice, bombed out chateaux, and abandoned churches. In photographs, letters, and diaries, the men recall their

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<sup>68</sup> Cabanes, *August 1914 France*, 171.

<sup>69</sup> Craig Gibson, “Through French Eyes: The British Expeditionary Force and the Records of the French Postal Censor,” *History Workshop Journal* No. 55 (Spring, 2003):186.

<sup>70</sup> Gibson, “Through French Eyes,” 186. Ralph Hale Mottram was a well known English writer and poet. During the war he served with the Norfolk Regiment in Flanders. Due to his fluency in French, he was transferred to the Franco-Belgian border where he investigated the claims of damage to crops and property by the British.

<sup>71</sup> Edmund P. Arpin and Ira Berlin, “A Wisconsinite in World War I: Reminiscences of Edmund P. Arpin, Jr. (Part I: Initiation),” *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 51, No. 1 (Autumn, 1967): 19.

experiences in the quiet town and the hospitality of the people. Placing American soldiers with French families during the war became successful and a comfort to both the men and the families while promoting comradeship among the men and between the men and the French civilians. They all came to depend on one another for companionship and support.<sup>72</sup>

The men of Section 591 lodged in the village of Jubicourt. Charlie “Liberty Bell” Panton wrote in his diary,

Jubicourt was an interesting little place of about 400 people in peacetime. It is about eight miles from Avacourt and about 40 miles southwest of Verdun. It had been taken by the Germans and retaken by the French, so had many marks of war. Eight women comprising four families continued to live there. They would not leave their homes but lived there during the *Boche* occupancy as well. They became very helpful to us.”<sup>73</sup> Kenneth “Ken” Easlick remembers Jubicourt as, “our home for evacuating wounded or sick soldats from the Avacourt section.”<sup>74</sup>

Section 591 member Leigh “Leigh” Hoodley in a letter written in the 1970s to Joseph W. “Honkey” Houser stated,

At Jubicourt we made our base head quarters in an old barn. It had a dirt floor and was quite wide, high, and spacious. It had been used by countless French troops since the beginning of the war and because of its open space was good for car, ambulance and truck repairs. It was good for a base of approximately 35 or 40 people. It was our base for 4 months... On our first few nights, or a week or so, some of us slept on straw on the ledge above the horse stalls. That is, until driven out by rats. Then we moved to the second floor or attic of the building on the right. This was owned by an old woman that also owned the barn. On the far left was an enclosed space used, or made for, the lieutenant, officers and staff. To the rear of this was the kitchen - real close to the rear of the barn was a room we had partitioned out of old boards covered with tar paper and old blankets, in which there was a long table, long benches, a tin stove that seldom worked, and which was dimly lighted by the stubs of candles. There was an opening entrance toward the left front closed by an old, heavy, blanket. This heavy closure produced much difficulty and was in the way and had to be pushed aside when one brought his food on a plate from the kitchen. It was quite dark in there so one sort of had to grope ones way until his eyes were adjusted to the darkness and could find a bench to sit on. The stove threw more smoke than heat so in the

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<sup>72</sup> Robert B. Bruce, *A Fraternity of Arms: America and France in the Great War* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2003): 111-112.

<sup>73</sup> Charles Ponton, *The Diary of Charlie “Liberty Bell” Ponton, Part I*. This is the abridged version. It was written from notes that were left by Ponton with his secretary, June, 1917, Folder 3, Box 8, THNDC.

<sup>74</sup> Kenneth Easlick, *History of Dental Public Health in the United States*, October 15, 1976, 136, Folder 25. Box 6, THNDC.



winter it was a chilly place and ones eyes were often filled with tears. But at that - it was home sweet home to the bunch. Here is where ... we ate our meals, wrote letters, sang songs, argued, and fought the war. It was what we fondly called, 'The Michigan Union.'<sup>75</sup>



*Figure 10 The Village of Jubricourt*



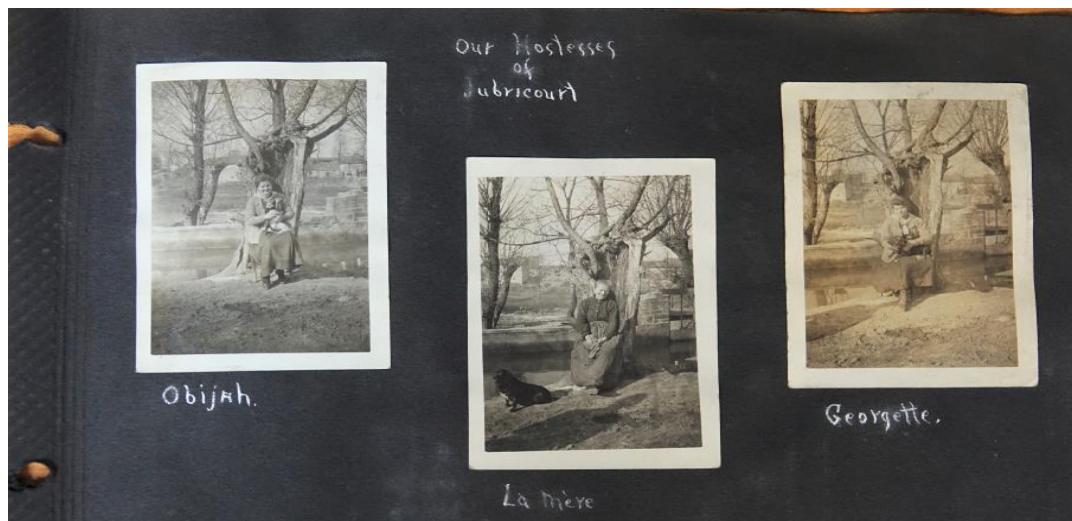
*Figure 11 On duty in the Village of Jubricourt*

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<sup>75</sup> This letter is not dated, but was most likely written after 1971. Houser states that he had been at his new Cambridge, Massachusetts address since then and had just received a note from Rosie regarding his update for the "gang," Folder. 8 Box 7. THNDC.

Many people willingly accepted the presence of these soldiers in order to assist their loved ones at the front. In his diary, Charlie “Liberty Bell” Ponton recalls,

The people are so polite that before you know it, you are exchanging greetings by facial expressions and you invariably start to talk English to them. They, in the same spirit, talk French to you. You speak slow and emphasize each word and if they can't understand you, become disgusted with them, because they can't 'compromise.' The Frenchmen, however, seldom become discouraged, but continue to repeat, each time faster, and louder!<sup>76</sup>



**Figure 12 French Women of Jubicourt**

Deyo made a favorable impression on several French civilians. Madame Abija LeGrand, a woman of Jubicourt who owned a grocery, was a special favorite of Section 591 as she took an interest in the men. The dedication of the 1946-1947 issue of *Le Jubicourt Matin* to her demonstrated this memorable bond. The foreword reads, "Dedicatory To Jubecyurt Department of the Meuse France and her citizens, the LeGrands, Abija and Georgette, and all the families we knew there thirty years ago, this issue of *The Jubecourt Matin* is affectionately dedicated."<sup>77</sup>

Abija LeGrand wrote two letters to Deyo in French; one in June 1965 and the other in September 1965. Deyo wrote back to her, in French, on September 12 telling her of his fond

<sup>76</sup> *The Diary of Charles N. Ponton Part II*, 60, Folder 24, Box 6, THNDC.

<sup>77</sup> *Le Jubecourt Matin*, 1946-1947, Folder 19, Box 4, THNDC.

remembrances of her and his gratitude regarding her care for the men of Section 591 while they billeted in Jubecourt. Abija wrote a letter to “Rosie” Lee on June 12, 1965. In the letter she shares her sentiments for the men of Section 591. She writes,

You ask, Do I remember Section 591? The number is engraved in my memory...I really loved all of you, one as much as the other and no one more than the other. But life resumed and forgetfulness follows. I thought that the halo with which I surrounded you had dazzled me for I had admired all of you. You were marvelous persons and all of you still are in spite of the years...but in the next issue of the ‘Jubecourt Matin’ make it known to all the veterans of 591 that I have not forgotten them and that I embrace them all.<sup>78</sup>

The Section presented her with a Certificate of Honor, printed in French, in recognition of their gratefulness. The 1965 edition of *Le Jubecourt Matin* is also dedicated to, “the village of Jubecourt, Meuse, France, and any of the old inhabitants still living there who may remember us.”<sup>79</sup> This edition contains a small photograph of Abija LeGrand at Jubecourt in 1917. On October 16, 1965, “Rosie” Lee wrote a postcard to Harry describing his recent visit to France. It read, “Yesterday I visited with Abija at her home in St. Mihiel (Meuse). Except for a useless right arm she seemed as bright and active as ever. Presented her with an electric table lamp as a section gift. She showed me your letter.”<sup>80</sup> “Bill” Votruba also visited with Abija in 1965. In a letter to Deyo he wrote, “My French while at Jubecourt was not good enough to talk to her but I shall always remember her nice smile.”<sup>81</sup> Madame Abija LeGrand certainly held a special place in the hearts of the men of 591, and they in hers long after the war.

Another special fondness was found in two letters written to Deyo by Mademoiselle Marie Challaye, a young woman who resided in the city of Grenoble. There is no mention of her in Deyo’s letters or photographs. However, some type of relationship occurred between them

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<sup>78</sup> Letter from Madame LeGrande, *Le Jubecourt Matin*, 1965, Folder 9, Box 5, THNDC.

<sup>79</sup> *Le Jubecourt Matin*, 1965, Folder 9, Box 5, THNDC.

<sup>80</sup> *Le Jubecourt Matin*, 1965, Folder 9, Box 5, THNDC.

<sup>81</sup> A letter to Deyo from William Votruba, May 22, 1965, Folder 32, Box 6, THNDC.

during his sojourn in France. Melle Challaye wrote two letters to Deyo in 1919, both expressions of sentiment on her part. These two letters, written in French, display her fondness for Harry and a wish to remain close even after the war ends. She wrote on April 4 to Deyo, “My dear Harry”, stating, “I received your kind letter announcing your departure [from France]. I do not see you coming again. Maybe I will see you again if that is our destiny.”<sup>82</sup> She desires to visit her “boyfriend” and “great love” in America and will keep wonderful memories of “my French boyfriend.” The next letter, written on September 19, suggests that she has not forgotten him and still dreams of coming to America to be with him again. Melle Challaye writes, “My dear Harry ... I was working hard with our farmer at my house ... and with my good memory I received the words of my great love ... Give me the news which has arrived at your home ... Do not forget me.”<sup>83</sup> No evidence of a response exists from Deyo to either of these letters. Nonetheless, they prove the argument that Deyo’s relationships with the French civilians resulted in an intimate fondness that lasted even after his return to his home.

### ***Le Jubicourt Matin: The Preservation of Memory***

*Le Jubicourt Matin* were circular letters written by the members of Section 591 from 1921 to 1967. These letters were the main tool for remembrance of the experiences of the men of Section 591 in France. The letters continued the bond of friendship and camaraderie the men formed during the Great War. They demonstrated the importance of this bond in the numerous editions of the *Jubicourt Matin* over a period of forty years. In the twenty-six editions of the *Matin*, the men of Section 591 fondly recalled their experiences and shared their lives with one

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<sup>82</sup> Letter from Melle Challaye, dated 4 Avril 1919, Folder 13, Box 6, THNDC.

<sup>83</sup> Letter from Melle Challaye, dated 19 Septembre, 1919, Folder 17, Box 6, THNDC.

another. The Great War bound them together, but the *Matin* sealed their alliance to one another for all time. Their bond would not be broken until the men themselves had passed on.

Dr. Kenneth A. “Ken” Easlick explained the meaning of the name *Le Jubicourt Matin* in his eulogy for Michael “Rosie” Lee. He stated, “Le Matin was the name of a morning French newspaper published in Paris in 1917. ‘Le Jubicourt Matin,’ hence, later became our unit’s annual, postwar newsletter.”<sup>84</sup> “Honkey” Houser, wrote, “But the Matin was born at a ville called Jubecourt in the days when we were very green to the grand racket.”<sup>85</sup> The first edition of *The Jubicourt Matin* was titled “Lest We Forget” and was edited by Harold E. “Fatty” Birch and Arthur E. “Artie” Cook. This edition contained letters written from 1921 to 1922 by the men of Section 591. The foreword stated, “The first issue of the Jubicourt Matin makes its appearance and welcomes every single man in 591 to the joy of its pages.”<sup>86</sup> This edition named the correspondence as circular letters and announced a reunion to be held on June 25, 1921. An entry from “Bill” Votruba’s diary titled *Memorandum Instructions*, listed the process of getting into the ambulances and hand signals for driving. Thus, *The Jubicourt Matin* began its enduring purpose of celebrating the camaraderie of the men of Section 591 over the next four decades.<sup>87</sup>

The next several editions were dedicated to the fallen members of the Section: Harold R. “Ici” Siggins, Dean C. Scroggie, Van E. Boyd, and Ogden M. Rathert. The foreword of the 1927 edition invited all members to submit a photograph of themselves with their families for the next issue. James F. “Granny” Jones asserted, “Those that ain’t been to Jubicourt ain’t been to

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<sup>84</sup> This was included in the eulogy for Michael “Rosie” Lee. It was written by Kenneth “Ken” Easlick, Folder 25, Box 6, THNDC.

<sup>85</sup> Joseph W. “Honkey” Houser in *The Jubicourt Matin*, 1929, Folder 10, Box 4, THNDC.

<sup>86</sup> *Le Jubicourt Matin*, 1917-1919, Folder 4, Box 4, THNDC.

<sup>87</sup> It was through these circular letters that the men of Section 591 remembered their experiences and fondness for one another.

war.”<sup>88</sup> Clyde W. “Kam” Kammerer remembered the events of 591 in Allentown, Pennsylvania in honor of the tenth anniversary of their stay at Camp Crane. Frank A. “Gus” Bauman recalled their voyage to France aboard the USS *Baltic* and the attack by the German submarine.

Subsequent editions of the *Matin* focused on sharing memories of the Great War and keeping current on the lives of each man of Section 591. Every member wrote a letter for each edition of the *Matin* and many facetiously apologized to the editor for not replying to the “summons” for a letter quickly enough.<sup>89</sup> However, each man stated how important the letters were to him as he stressed waiting for the new edition and rereading it many times over while waiting for the next one. Harold “Fatty” Birch writes,

how individual each letter is and how expressive of each fellow in the outfit. The letters certainly bring back fond memories and how remarkable it is, as one of the men expressed it, ‘that after so many years apart, yet on meeting again, the years seem to have vanished and we are again back at Jubicourt, Gloria and other places dear to our memories.’ That exactly expresses my feelings too. I imagine it will always be like that.<sup>90</sup>

In the 1930 edition of *The Jubicourt Matin*, Leon J. “Dutch” Reigman writes, “The one thing that fastens itself a little stronger every year is the memory of those two eventful years we spent together, as the fellow says, the stories become more vivid...”<sup>91</sup> The men reported on additions to their family, their work experiences, visits with one another, their reunions, and their opinions on the politics of the time. These letters are a chronicle of the effects of America’s history on individual lives through the interwar years, the Great Depression, World War II, and the politics of the 1950s and 1960s. The men jokingly recalled the everyday experiences of ambulance drivers in the villages and among one another. Clyde W. “Kam” Kammerer referred

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<sup>88</sup> *The Jubicourt Matin*, 1927, Folder 8, Box 4, THNDC.

<sup>89</sup> Often, members of the Section were chided by the others for not responding quickly enough to the call for their updated letter. The men jokingly referred to these “summons” in their own letters. THNDC.

<sup>90</sup> *Le Jubecourt Matin*, 1940, Folder 16, Box 4, THNDC.

<sup>91</sup> *The Jubicourt Matin*, 1967, Folder 11, Box 4, THNDC.

to “Ici” Siggins remembering the fallen hero as, “... he was the mechanic who put those Fiats into shape while some dozen bum French mechanics looked on.”<sup>92</sup> They also bravely recollected the dangerous runs they made to the front and their fears as they were fired upon by the *Boche* while transporting the wounded. The honesty in the writings of these events gives clues to the importance of their bond. William “Bill” Votruba recalls that there was, “A fraternal feeling-not without an occasional outburst of tempers-but on the whole everyone was interested in everyone else and did what he could to make things easier, shared food-helped in car breakdowns, and took over when sickness came.”<sup>93</sup> Their reliance on one another was imperative to their mission and ultimate survival. Section 591 was awarded the French Croix de Guerre with Two Silver Stars for courage in their work from September 3 to 18, 1918 and September 22 to 24, 1918.

The Round Robin letters, or chain letters, written by and to the remaining eleven members of Section 591 lasted from August 11, 1970 to May 17, 1975. Charles H. “Griesy” Griesinger wrote the first letter and sent it to Honkey. He, in turn, wrote one and sent it along with Griesy’s letter to the next man. Earl G. “Dorf” Dorfner wrote in his letter on November 11, 1970,

In conversation with old veteran friends and many younger ones, I usually have to explain why I always say that my outfit in World War I is unique in the annals of the military, and not until I tell of our history do they understand the deep affection I have, and have always had, for all of them. Recruited from a common source, we trained and drilled together (Allentown), went overseas together (U.S.S. *Baltic*), spent nearly two years in France together, and when we returned, and for over fifty years since then we have kept in close touch with every member with our *Jubecourt Matin* and by our private correspondence, and by our get-togethers and reunions originally every ten years and then every five years. I have never heard of any group in any service and any war that can equal that record or even approach it.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> *Jubecourt Matin*, 1929, Folder 10, Box 4, THNDC.

<sup>93</sup> *Le Jubecourt Matin*, 1962, Folder 8, Box 5, THNDC.

<sup>94</sup> Round Robin letter, Folder 11, Box 5, THNDC.

Clyde W. “Kam” Kammerer suggests, “Let us keep this round-robin method of communicating even to the last man or last two. I am sure all of you are like I am... read and reread the letters several times as well as look over back numbers of the *Matin*. And when this happens, your letters speak to me just as if you were there in person in the full bloom of youth as we all remember one another.”<sup>95</sup> The Round Robin letters ended on May 17, 1975.

Lieutenant Colonel Deyo again volunteered to serve his country during World War II. He was assigned to the Sixth Army at the Presidio in San Francisco, California and Okinawa where he was as a member of the Reserve Officer Corps serving as a Judge Advocate General. During the war years, Deyo continued to keep in touch with the men of Section 591, some of whom also served again in the Army. The camaraderie of the men of Section 591 endured through political differences, changes in employment, personal loss, and the death of friends. The many issues of the *Jubicourt Matin* kept the men bound to one another and paid tribute to their memories of a shared time long ago that forged lasting friendships.

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<sup>95</sup> Round Robin letter, Folder 11, Box 5, THNDC.



## Conclusion

Harry N. Deyo passed away in November 1977 having had an interesting military career and a successful private law practice in Detroit, Michigan. In the 22<sup>nd</sup> Edition of *Le Jubecourt Matin*, Deyo wrote, “I shall look forward to hearing from the old gang because, as we all well know, our interest in each other is not founded on politics, finances or other selfish forces but upon mutual respect and friendliness acquired and formed many years ago.”<sup>96</sup> The *Jubicourt Matin* was an instrument used to maintain Deyo’s World War I memory. Harry N. Deyo formed a unique bond with the men of Section 591 and French civilians during the Great War.

The 100th anniversary of World War I sparked resurgence in the study of the many aspects surrounding the Great War and its global importance. Historians have presented an overall study of the doughboy, *poulu*, and *Boche*, their relationship to one another, and their struggles throughout the war as a whole. However, little documentation exists with regard to the individual experiences of ambulance drivers and the camaraderie among the drivers of their Section and with the French people. This thesis fills that gap by exposing the personal experiences of an ambulance driver and his relationships with his comrades and the people of France. The written testimony of Deyo and the men of Section 591 highlight their deeply meaningful relationship during the war in France and its lasting effect on their lives after the Great War. These men were quick to comment on the spirit and camaraderie among their section, their bravery, and their dedication to one another. They remained extremely appreciative of the French civilians who became near to their hearts as they cared for the men during the war. Evidence of this appreciation is demonstrated in the circular letters of *The Jubicourt Matin* as well as in the letters and photos passed among the men and the French villagers after the Great War. These experiences encompassed not only Deyo’s military service,

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<sup>96</sup> *Le Jubecourt Matin*, 1949, Folder 2, Box 5, THNDC.

but positively influenced the relationships he forged while in France with the men of Section 591 and the people of France. The veterans of Section 591 maintained close ties in remembrance of their wartime experience over a period of forty years. The editions of *The Jubicourt Matin* and the Round Robin letters shaped the memories which remained a vital part of Deyo's life. His experiences as an ambulance driver in France had a long-reaching effect on the men of Section 591 and the French civilians they encountered during the Great War. The artifacts from the Harry N. Deyo Collection express his sense of national duty, loyalty to the men in Section 591, and affection for the people of France.

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## **Appendix** **The Harry N. Deyo Collection**

Harry N. Deyo, a 1917 graduate of the University of Michigan, was a volunteer in the United States Army Ambulance Service during the Great War. His unit, Section 591, was embedded with the French Army in France from June 1917- April 1919. The life and military career of Harry N. Deyo serve as examples of an American dedicated to his country, his comrades, and civilians affected by the war in France.

In the Summer of 2016, Deyo's granddaughter contacted the University of New Orleans and offered to loan the university several items belonging to her grandfather, a member of the United States Army Ambulance Service who fought in France during the Great War. Her father had recently moved from his home in Ohio and rediscovered these artifacts in the attic. Not able to move them to his home in Florida, he gave them to his children. They, in turn, thought that these artifacts would be of interest to the university. Upon receiving the first box, nine in all, the faculty of the History Department began to implement some of the artifacts into the curriculums of graduate classes. A photograph album consisting of over one hundred photographs and many other mementoes of interest became the first of these artifacts to be introduced to students. Over the last three years, many items from the collection have been not only used by professors, but by the students themselves.

A website containing exhibits of Deyo's digitized photographs, maps, the use of cameras in the Great War, the development of photographs, and the importance of new technology and machinery was developed in a World War I Public History graduate class. The photographs found on the website, <http://worldwaronememory.omeka.net>, provide the support for the lessons and activities to be used by teachers and students in their further study of the Great War. The photographs were compiled in individual exhibits with narratives and background information on

the chosen theme. The twelve exhibits of the collection focus on the main themes found in the photograph album. First, students were introduced to the album which had been digitized by Dr. James Mokhiber and Melanie S. Gaumont. Several classes were then devoted to analyzing the photographs and choosing the ones that pertained to each student's chosen theme. Themes included on the website are: The Making of the Album, The Experiences of Harry N. Deyo: An Ambulance Driver during the Great War in France, Humor in Wartime, French Rural Life, Postcards from the Front, Death and Destruction, and a Map of France from 1914 – 1919. Subsequent classes were devoted to downloading the photographs, completing the Dublin Core for each, and writing the narratives which would accompany each photograph. Melanie S. Gaumont wrote the introduction for the collection which included background information on the experiences of Pvt. Deyo during the Great War. The exhibits were published in January 2018 at <http://worldwaronememory.omeka.net>.

In addition to the digitized exhibits, the home page of the website includes tabs which are focused on further learning. Many opportunities exist for students and educators of all grade levels, as well as any history enthusiast, to take advantage of the information offered on the website. The interactive map of France allows a researcher to view the towns and battles that Pvt. Deyo experienced. Various lesson plans are available for teachers to use with their students as enrichment to a World War I curriculum. These lesson plans are written using Common Core State Standards and are applicable for the curriculum in sixth through eleventh grades. The website includes lesson plans and activities for the curriculums of social studies, art, ELA, creative writing, and science. Activities and a rubric for each lesson plan are provided and may be used as a written assessment. The Links tab redirects the researcher to additional websites important to the study of the Great War. These encompass museums, cemeteries, and



monuments in France, the United States, Army Medical Department of Medical History, the United States Medical Department Office, battle sites, suggestions for further reading, as well as video footage from the war. The website is also an invaluable source for elementary, high school, and college students who are conducting extensive research on the Great War and its influence on American ambulance drivers and French civilians.

The Harry N. Deyo Collection website gives an unexpected view of the experiences of an ambulance driver in France during the Great War. Historians of all ages and interests are invited to relive an ambulance driver's experiences while journeying through The Harry N. Deyo Collection.

## THE GREAT WAR RECRUITING POSTER PROJECT RUBRIC

Each student and a partner will research the following topics on the Great War using photographs and letters from The Harry N. Deyo Collection and the websites found on the Links tab:

- Ambulances
- Ambulance drivers
- Technology
- French civilians
- French villages
- Camaraderie

The students will use the research that was gathered to construct a recruiting poster for ambulance drivers to serve in France during the Great War. The poster must include the following:

- A slogan
- Artifacts from the collection
- Scenes depicting the slogan
- Colorful design

The project will be graded on each student's contribution and the final project. Markers and/or colored pencils may be used to complete the poster. Be creative!

### RUBRIC

1. The project was turned in on time. Students' names were written on the back of the project. 10 points \_\_\_\_\_
2. The poster shows evidence that the students used the photographs and letters from the collection. 20 points \_\_\_\_\_
3. All required information was included on the poster. 40 points \_\_\_\_\_
4. The poster had an original design and was creative. 20 points \_\_\_\_\_
5. The students worked cooperatively in class. 10 points \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL \_\_\_\_\_

## **THE GREAT WAR RECRUITING POSTER PROJECT**

**GRADE LEVEL/SUBJECT:** 7th grade American History

**DATES/TIME FRAME:** 3 days

### **OBJECTIVES:**

#### **THE STUDENT WILL:**

- Develop an understanding of the importance of American volunteers to serve as ambulance drivers in France during the Great War
- Research the importance of recruiting posters
- Choose a photograph or artifact from the collection as inspiration for the poster and analyze the emotion portrayed in the photograph or artifact
- Relate the photograph or artifact to an aspect of the design of the poster
- Design the poster based on the theme of the importance of ambulance drivers to the war
- Analyze the important objects/people in a photograph and their importance in the interpretation of an historical event

#### **ELA COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS:**

Reading Instruction: 1-9

Writing: 1-9

Speaking and Listening: 1-6

Language: 1-5

#### **SOCIAL STUDIES COMMON CORE STANDARDS:**

##### **STANDARD 1: HISTORICAL THINKING SKILLS**

#### **INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES:**

- Discussion of the role of ambulance drivers in the Great War
- Time for students to review the websites found on the Links tab of the website
- Review of the rubric
- Teacher guidance as students are gathering information and designing the poster

#### **ASSESSMENT:**

- Completed poster
- Teacher observation

#### **MATERIALS:**

- Computer
- <http://worldwaronememory.omeka.net>
- Poster board
- markers/colored pencils

## VITA

Melanie S. Gaumond was born in New Orleans, Louisiana. She received a Bachelor of Elementary Education with a minor in Kindergarten from Southeastern Louisiana University in 1983, graduating cum laude. She was a teacher at St. Mary Magdalen School from 1995-2019 and received the Outstanding Teacher of the Year Award from Cabrini High School in 2000. She was a contractor at the National World War II Museum from 2019-2020. A lover of history, she has traveled throughout the United States visiting battlefield sites, National Parks, museums, and Presidential Libraries. In Fall 2016, she was accepted into the University of New Orleans Master of Arts program with a focus on American History. She has archived the *Harry N. Deyo Collection, An Ambulance Driver during the Great War in France*, which is housed at the Earl K. Long Library at the University of New Orleans in New Orleans, Louisiana.