



National Museum of Health and Medicine

Otis Historical Archives

OHA 29

Curatorial Records: World War I and II Photography and Film Records

Date of Records: 1916-1921 and 1942-1946

Size: .75 cubic feet

Finding aid by: Eric W. Boyle

Access and Use: The Otis Historical Archives is committed to providing open access to its collections as far as possible within the limits of privacy and confidentiality. Access to this collection is at the discretion of the Otis Historical Archives and material contained within the records may be subject to review before access is granted.

Series/Scope and Content Note: This collection contains materials related to the photographic and motion picture work of the Army during World War I and World War II. Primary source materials include correspondence, reports, and catalogues. Additional materials document the history of this effort.

SERIES 001: WORLD WAR I FILMS

This series primarily includes correspondence material related to the syphilis education film *Fit to Fight*. *Fit to Fight* was an instrument of the Commission on Training Camp Activities, created in 1917 to make sure World War I training camps were healthy environments, free of sexual temptation and venereal disease. Headed by the famous Progressive lawyer, reformer and investigator Raymond Fosdick, the CTCA was also known as the "Fosdick Commission." *Fit to Fight*, the first educational film ever produced by the government, represented the culmination of the propaganda effort that became an integral part of the CTCA's social hygiene campaign. The film follows five draftees, each representing a particular social background, as they make their way through training camp. Each responds differently to the company commander's lecture on the hazards of venereal disease. Three of the men fall to the temptation of a local brothel and spend the war in the hospital at government expense. The film was subsequently declared obscene in New York State and banned in Pennsylvania. Catholic lay organizations bitterly protested the public release of the film throughout the nation. By 1922, the Public Health Service had withdrawn all its anti-venereal films. *Fit for America*, a film adapted from *Fit to Fight* after World War I, portrays two young recruits who meet a fellow soldier who played the part of Billy Hale, a college quarterback who was introduced beating up a pacifist in the original production of *Fit to Fight*. Billy helps teach the young soldiers how the lessons from the film apply in peacetime. In addition to the script from *Fit for America*, this series also includes a list of medical film subjects offered by the



Instructional Laboratory of the Surgeon General's Office and a catalogue for the surgical, medical, and dental offerings of the Clinico Motion Pictures company from 1916.

SERIES 002: WORLD WAR II MEDICAL PHOTOGRAPHY

The Museum and Medical Arts Service detachment was created in 1942. First Lieutenant Ralph P. Creer reported for duty as the first Curator in the administration of the unit in April. Creer was soon joined by one officer and six enlisted men. The new organization was attached to the Museum for training purposes and all material collected was to be shipped to the Museum for study and research. All of the art materials were furnished by the Signal Corps in the theater. The photographers received training and actual experience with the apparatus and materials which were employed in overseas assignments. The photography of patients, gross specimens, and surgical operations accounted for the greater portion of their work. The Army used photography as an aid to doctors in the study and prognosis of particular cases and for documenting unusual cases and developments and techniques, especially in the fields of neurosurgery, plastic surgery, and paraplegia. By the first quarter of 1945, the first six units reported taking 5,923 black and white photographs, 1,911 color films, and 23,990 feet of motion picture films. In addition to material documenting the history of this effort, this series includes correspondence on the work of the Museum and Medical Arts Service from 1943 and a report on the accomplishments of the Army Medical Illustration Service from 1946.

SERIES 003: WORLD WAR I MUSEUM PHOTOGRAPHIC UNIT

Medical illustration in the U.S. Army received a major boost from World War I, as the Army recognized that a more active photographic service could be a valuable tool in the effective and efficient dissemination of medical knowledge. In April 1918, Col. Louis B. Wilson reported to France for duty as Director of the National Army Medical Museum Unit. In May, Col. Wilson requested a staff of clinical photographers and artists. Finally, in September 1918, one officer and seven enlisted men arrived in France prepared to take still and motion pictures of war wounds and injuries. Several medical artists and moulage experts soon followed and a general illustration unit was established. Amateur photographers had already begun some of the work, but prior to 1918 the practice of photography in the American Expeditionary Forces had otherwise been limited to the Signal Corps. Following a General Order that charged the medical department with making technical photographs of surgical and pathological interest, a survey was made to ascertain the availability of suitable photographic equipment. During three months of actual service approximately 1,000 photographs of technical subjects were taken prior to the signing of the armistice. Following the armistice, clinical photographers joined with the Signal Corps in illustrating the medical history of the war with still and motion pictures. This group made more than 10,000 still pictures and about 40,000 feet of motion pictures of hospital activities, hospital locations, and group and individual pictures of the medical officers of the General Staff. This series documents the correspondence regarding the photographs taken during this period, and primarily includes requests for copies and cooperative replies.

For additional information on *Fit to Fight*, see Allan M. Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States Since 1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 68-75. For additional information on the history of medical films and photography in World War I and II, see the document "History of the Museum and Medical Arts Service," in this series, Box 001, Folder 00012. See also "Medical Illustration in the United States Army," by Captain Ralph P. Creer, Box 001, Folder 00014;



and “Medical Photography in the Army,” by Major Sergeant Stephen P. Dittmann, Box 001, Folder 00016.

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BOX AND CONTENT LIST

SERIES 001: WORLD WAR I FILMS

Box 001:

00001: Film Subjects, Instructional Laboratory of the Surgeon General’s Office

00002: Clinico Motion Pictures Catalogue: Surgical, Medical, Dental (ca. 1916)

00003: Fit to Fight, Correspondence, May 1918

00004: Fit to Fight, Correspondence, July 1918

00005: Fit to Fight, Correspondence, August 1918

00006: Fit to Fight, Correspondence, September 1918

00007: Fit to Fight, Correspondence, October 1918

00008: Fit to Fight, Correspondence, November 1918

00009: Fit to Fight, Correspondence, December 1918

00010: “Fit for America,” Script, n.d.

00011: Fit for America, Correspondence, February 1919-May 1919

SERIES 002: WORLD WAR II MEDICAL PHOTOGRAPHY

Box 001:

00012: “History of the Museum and Medical Arts Service”



- 00013: Medical Detachment, Museum and Medical Arts Service, Table of Equipment, November 1942
- 00014: Creer, Ralph P. "Medical Illustration in the U.S. Army," Reprint, February 1943
- 00015: Museum and Medical Arts Service, Correspondence, June 1943-August 1943
- 00016: Dittman, Stephen P. "Medical Photography in the Army," Reprint, Sept. 1946
- 00017: Army Medical Illustration Service, Final Report of Accomplishments, 1946

SERIES 003: WORLD WAR I MUSEUM PHOTOGRAPHIC UNIT

Box 002:

- 00001: World War I Museum Photographic Unit, Correspondence, July-Nov. 1918
- 00002: World War I Museum Photographic Unit, Correspondence, December 1918
- 00003: World War I Museum Photographic Unit, Correspondence, January 1919
- 00004: World War I Museum Photographic Unit, Correspondence, February 1919
- 00005: World War I Museum Photographic Unit, Correspondence, March 1919
- 00006: World War I Museum Photographic Unit, Correspondence, April 1919
- 00007: World War I Museum Photographic Unit, Correspondence, May 1919
- 00008: World War I Museum Photographic Unit, Correspondence, June 1919
- 00009: World War I Museum Photographic Unit, Correspondence, July 1919
- 00010: List of Hospital Centers and Medical Supply Depots to Be Photographed From The Air, n.d.
- 00011: Still Photographs/Pictures, List, January 1919
- 00012: List of Photographs Taken in Base Section No. 2, April 1919
- 00013: List of Pictures Sent to Chief Surgeon's Office, April 1919
- 00014: Record of Transfer of Signal Corps Photos, 1920
- 00015: Signal Corps Photo Transfer Descriptors, 4050-16837
- 00016: Signal Corps Photo Transfer Descriptors, 17131-44154



00017: Signal Corps Photo Transfer Descriptors, 44170-51147

00018: Signal Corps Photo Transfer Descriptors, 51162-161716