
Guide to Lt. Francis M. Tompkins World War One Scrapbooks



Gettysburg College, Musselman Library
Special Collections & College Archives

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MS – 155: The Lt. Francis M. Tompkins World War One Scrapbooks

(1 boxes, .75 cubic feet)

Inclusive Dates: 1917-1921

Bulk Dates: 1918-1919

Processed by: Amy Lucadamo, Archivist

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Provenance

The scrapbooks in this collection were purchased from the Philadelphia Print Shop in May of 2013.

Biography

Francis M. Tompkins was born on March 18, 1888 in Dallas, TX to Mary and Milton Tompkins. Prior to his service in WWI, Tompkins was living in Clearfield, PA with his mother, sister, Phila and brother-in-law, Grant Thompson. Both Tompkins and his brother-in-law were employed in a local coal mine.

On June 5, 1917, Tompkins registered for the draft indicating that he was single and employed as a coal mine operator in Portage, PA. His registration card notes that he was of medium height and build with thinning light hair and blue eyes. By September, Tompkins was stationed at Camp Lee in Petersburg, VA as a member of the Army's 80th Division, 305th Engineers Regiment. On October 19, 1917 the *Indiana Evening Gazette* noted Tompkins' promotion to corporal and undated clippings pasted into the first of Tompkins' scrapbooks describe further promotions to master engineer and first lieutenant. News of these promotions was received in letters from Tompkins to his brother, Horace A. Tompkins, who was serving as a state senator at the time.

After the Armistice, Tompkins requested to extend his service and he was granted three additional months in France. The presence of picture postcards from Belgium, Brittany, and Cologne indicate that Tompkins traveled during this period in addition to his duties. He collected photographs of the July 14, 1919 Armistice Parade in Paris.

Upon returning to the United States, Tompkins went back to coal mining in Portage, PA. He was listed as a lodger with the Groake family in Cambria, PA in the 1920 Census, which is the last time he appears. The next documentation of Tompkins is his death record. He died in Chicago, IL on April 2, 1928. At the time of his death he was married to Mabel Tompkins and working as a cashier. When he married and moved away from Pennsylvania is unknown.

Scope and Content Notes

Francis M. Tompkins created three scrapbooks with images and materials that he collected during his service in WWI from 1917-1920. Most of the images are official army photographs printed on postcard stock. They are labeled on the image and sometimes dated. Additionally, Tompkins provides detailed descriptions of the locations, battles, individuals, and views

pictured in the photographs. He describes the movements of the 305th Engineers and the tasks they performed in each location, often building bridges to allow for the movement of soldiers and equipment.

The first scrapbook begins with Tompkins' training at Camp Lee and includes light-hearted snapshots of fellow soldiers and their barracks. The photographs are supplemented with newspaper clippings from his hometown newspapers reporting on local men in the 305th Engineers.

The second and third scrapbooks are larger in size than the first and have identical green covers. The second documents Tompkins' experiences from May 26, 1918 when his regiment shipped out of Newport News, VA on the U.S.S. Huron to his post-war travels in Europe. The third contains collected items about his regiment like written histories and newspaper clippings. It also contains American Expeditionary Force (AEF) publications and souvenirs like a postcard made out of wood taken from the wing of a downed German plane.

One strength of this collection in addition to the visual materials is the amount of description that Tompkins gives on each page. His inclusion of dates and documentation of place names allows the viewer to follow the 305th Engineers through France. He does not tell elaborate stories or describe personalities, but he does give insight to the tasks that the engineers performed and the role that they played in getting men and equipment to the front.

What the scrapbooks are lacking is description of Tompkins feelings about what he saw or his interactions with family and friends at home or in the service. He collected postcards for their images, but left their backs blank.

Series Description

This collection is organized into only one series, Scrapbooks.

Box List

Box 1

Scrapbook one – red cover, 8x10"

Highlights:

- AEF identify card with uniformed photo of Tompkins
- Good Conduct Pass from Headquarters 305th Engineers, Camp Lee, VA
- Newspaper clippings re. 80th Division from Camp Lee out of Clearfield County, PA
- "I have arrived safely in overseas" postcard sent to parents, 6/20/1918
- Photographs of camp and groups of soldiers horsing around at Camp Lee
- Travel postcards of Richmond, VA
- Newspaper clipping about Tompkins commission
- Program from Clearfield, PA Presbyterian Church, 9/30/1917 listing "our boys how have volunteered"

Scrapbook two – green cover, 11x14½”

Highlights:

Photograph postcards from Army photographs
Notations about setting sail for France from Newport News, VA on the U.S.S. Huron, 5/26/1918 & landing at Brest, France on 6/8/1918
Images from Camp Pontanezen, Brest, France
Training with British equipment at the British camp in Calais
Sent to the Somme front, 7/14/1918 and experienced shell fire
Moved to the Argonne
Started the Meuse-Argonne drive, 9/26/1918
Positioned on Le Mort Homme or Dead Man’s Hill
Shelled overnight, 10/1/1918, lost 11 horses
Photographs of American observation balloons
Battle of Imme court, 11/1/1918 – built bridges under shell fire
Images of German retreat near Buzancy, 11/9/1918
Photographs of German and American planes and French tanks
Left the front lines on 11/11/1918 and hear of the Armistice: “stood around the band which played ‘Home Sweet Home’”
Hiked 18 days to Dijon, 125 mi south of Paris
Returned to Brest to ship home on the U.S.S. Troy
Discharge at Camp Dix, NJ
Various images of equipment – French artillery, German planes, disabled German tanks, a disabled U-boat
Photographs of the ruins of Rheims, Amiens, Louvain, Arras, Valenciennes, and Brussels
Various travel postcards – country scenes of Brittany, Belgium, Cologne, possibly from a trip along the Rhine
Armistice Parade in Paris, 7/14/1919
Photographs of regimental staff, band, officers
305th Engineers Division photograph (8x10”) in LeMans 4/27/1919

Scrapbook three – green cover, 11x14½”

Highlights:

Newspaper clippings about the 80th Division and 305th Engineers from hometown and national papers
Maps of territory covered by Division
Orders given to Tompkins after the War in response to his request to remain in Europe
Tompkins’ Service Record
Postcard made from the wood from a downed German plane, sent to Tompkins’ sister
AEF publications
Scrap of woven clothe described as a piece of a “German bed sack”
Regimental histories of the 305th Engineers