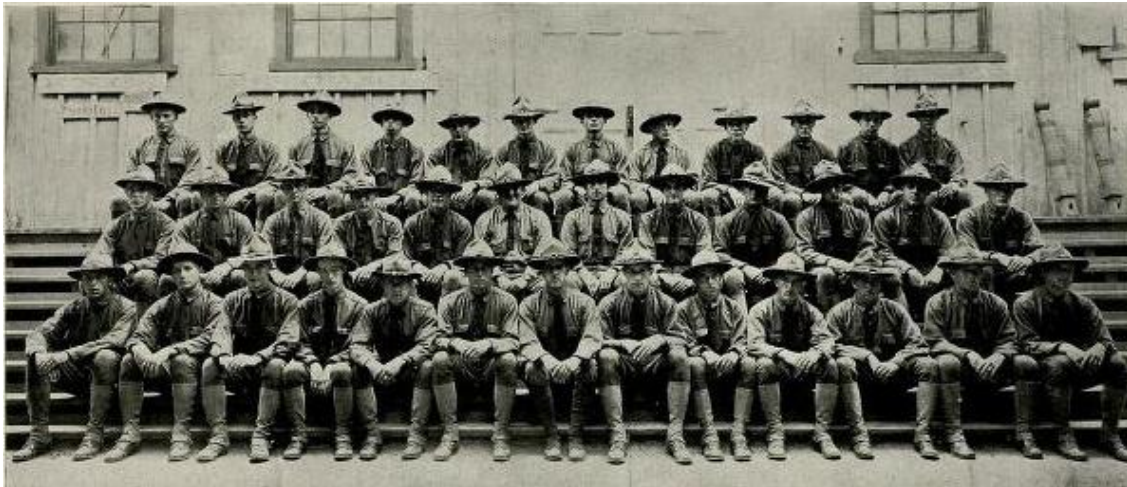


**Guide to the**  
John Alexander Kinnear  
WWI Letters  
1916-1919



**Gettysburg College, Musselman Library  
Special Collections & College Archives**

**Dori Gorczyca  
July 2013**

## **MS – 148: WWI Letters of John Alexander Kinnear**

( 1 box, 0.31 cubic feet)

Inclusive Dates: 1916-1919

*Processed by: Dori Gorczyca  
July 2013*

### **Provenance**

Purchased by Gettysburg College Special Collections, 2013.

### **Biography**

John Alexander Kinnear was born on October 21<sup>st</sup>, 1898 in Rockbridge County, Virginia to John Joseph Lyle Kinnear and Rachel Isabella Kinnear. In his letters, Kinnear mentions two brothers, Duncan Lyle and Horace, and two of his three sisters, Margaret (Mary B.) and Isabel.

In the fall of 1915, Kinnear entered Washington and Lee University as a member of the class of 1919. In 1917, after his sophomore year, Washington and Lee University called for volunteers to organize an ambulance unit to help with the war efforts abroad. Kinnear was one of twenty seven students (along with four alumni and one associate professor of the university) chosen by the school from seventy five candidates. By June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1917, Kinnear had arrived at Camp Crane (established in May of 1919) in Allentown Pennsylvania as a member of the U.S. Ambulance Corp Unit S.S.U. 534. The United States Army Ambulance Service was a unique organization because it was assembled by the United States Government for the primary use as a part of a foreign army.

Kinnear and his unit trained and were equipped at Camp Crane from June of 1917 to January of 1918. On January 9<sup>th</sup>, the unit sailed from New York on the ship *Camania* to England. The unit spent some time in an army camp in England, but by early March they moved into France. Between March 20<sup>th</sup> and April 10<sup>th</sup>, Kinnear and his unit ferried the wounded away from the front lines during the Spring Offensive begun by the Germans during this time (Operation Michael). In April, after this “most strenuous period,” as Kinnear described it, the unit was removed to the Lorraine front and saw less action while stationed there.

By the end of July 1918, Kinnear and the unit moved and again underwent a period of heavy action during the Second Battle of the Marne. In October the unit left France and

worked in Belgium until the end of the war. The Armistice occurred on November 11<sup>th</sup> of 1918, but the Washington and Lee Unit stayed in Europe doing civilian relief work and manning ambulance posts. According to Kinnear's letters, the group left France from Sainte-Nazaire on May 18<sup>th</sup>, returned to the United States by May 29<sup>th</sup>, and was discharged from Camp Dix in New Jersey.

The unit received two citations for their service (the citation was known as the Croix de Guerre). Kinnear received an additional Croix de Guerre for his individual service as an ambulance driver for his time on active duty. Kinnear returned to Washington and Lee University for one year and graduated in 1920. He passed away on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1926 at age 27. He is buried in the Timber Ridge Presbyterian Churchyard in Rockbridge County, Virginia.

### **Scope and Content**

The letters of John Alexander Kinnear consist of 7 postcards and 92 letters which were written by Kinnear to his family living near Lexington Virginia. The letters range in dates from November of 1916 (before Kinnear joined the service) to May of 1919 (after he arrived home from Europe). The letters are mainly addressed to his mother, Mrs. J. J. L. Kinnear, but there are some that are addressed to his father and siblings.

The majority of the letters were written during Kinnear's time in the United States Ambulance Service during World War 1. The letters include insight into camp life at Camp Crane in Allentown, Pennsylvania as well as a description of his time ferrying the wounded from the front lines in France and Belgium during World War 1. The postcards were sent from Camp Crane and have pictures of the camp. The one 1916 letter was written during Kinnear's time at Washington and Lee University before he joined the Ambulance Corps.

### **Series Description**

This collection is ordered chronologically. There are 13 folders with letters and postcards. The first folder contains typed transcriptions of all letters and postcards.

## **Box 1**

1-1 – Inventory and transcriptions

*Finding aid*

*Note on the transcriptions*

*99 transcriptions*

1-2 – Postcards

*7 postcards*

1-3 – 1916

*1 letter*

1-4 – 1917 Jun 10-28

*9 letters*

1-5 – 1917 Jul 3-31

*11 letters*

1-6 – 1917 Aug 3-26

*10 letters*

1-7 – 1917 Sept 1 - Oct 30

*9 letters*

1-8 – 1917 Nov 3 – Dec 28

*7 letters*

1-9 – 1918 Jan 11 – Apr 28

*11 letters*

1-10 – 1918 May 5 – Jun 30

*10 letters*

1-11 – 1918 Jul 2 – Aug 25

*7 letters*

1-12 – 1918 Oct 18 – Dec 14

*5 letters*

1-13 – 1919 Jan 13 – May 29

*10 letters*

1-14 – Misc. (letters without dates and envelopes without letters)

*2 letters*

*14 envelopes*