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American Expeditionary Force. 35th Division. 138th Infantry. Company I. Records, 1917-1976

1 box

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Finding aid revised by Jaime Bourassa, March 2013

REPOSITORY

Missouri History Museum Archives

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DONOR INFORMATION

The papers of Company I, 138th Infantry, American Expeditionary Forces (World War I), were donated to the Missouri Historical Society on December 18, 1980, by Frederic L. Niemeyer, a veteran of Company I.

HISTORICAL SKETCH

Company I, 138th Infantry Regiment, 35th Division of the American Expeditionary Forces, came into existence on October 1, 1917, when the First and Fifth Infantry Regiments of the Missouri National Guard were consolidated at Camp Doniphan, Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Company I, whose members were all from the St. Louis area, trained at Camp Doniphan until April 16, 1918, when the unit was sent by train to New York for embarkation for Europe. The company left for Europe on May 2, and after a brief layover in England, arrived in France on May 19.

The men of Company I spent most of the next two months training, marching, and camping at various locations in the Vosges region of France. On July 17, 1918, they saw their first action in the trenches of France when Company I relieved another unit on the Collette front. Two days later, Company I itself was relieved, and the men began another period of marching, training, and camping. In early September, Company I, along with the rest of the 35th Division, was sent to the Saint-Mihiel area, where it was held in reserve during the Allied offensive in that region. Later in that month, after being sent into the Argonne forest region of northeastern France, the company took part in the Battle of the Argonne from September 26 through September 30. Here, near the town of Cheppy, Company I's commanding officer, Captain Alexander R. Skinker, was killed on September 26 while trying to knock out a German machine gun emplacement. For this action, Skinker was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Company I spent the month of October and the first days of November marching, training, and occasionally manning the trenches in a "quiet" sector. On November 11, 1918, the armistice was signed, and World War I ended. The company left France on April 16, 1919, and landed at Newport News, Virginia, on April 28. On May 12, Company I was mustered out of active service.

The veterans of Company I organized an active reunion association, and held the first of many annual reunions in 1922. In addition to the annual reunions, which continued into the 1970s, the men of Company I held other events, including annual picnics until 1943. Through these events, the men kept in touch with one another over many years, and gathered together to remember their youthful military adventures and commemorate their lost comrades.

Their greatest commemorative effort took place in September 1921, when the body of Captain Skinker was returned from France for burial in St. Louis. The funeral of Captain Skinker, on September 11, 1921, was a full military affair that required many months of planning. More than 5,000 mourners attended the funeral, and many members of Company I played important roles in the proceedings. From then on, a tribute to Captain Skinker became a regular feature of each annual reunion of Company I.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection consists of approximately 200 documents, and is arranged in the following three series: **Active Duty Series** (1917-1919), **Reunion Association Series** (1926-1976), and the **1921 Funeral of Captain Alexander R. Skinker Series** (1918-1923). Among the materials in this collection are a reminiscence, a biography, company histories, minutes, reunion announcements and reports, general and specialized membership lists, correspondence, press clippings (all of which have been photocopied), bills and receipts, and assorted printed materials, including programs, tickets and invitations, cemetery maps, commemoratives, and a song. One hundred eleven photographs of Company I, 138th Infantry, were transferred to the Photographs and Prints Department.

The **Active Duty Series** includes two chronological histories of Company I (one of which appears to be a first draft of the other) and a number of clippings dated 1918-1919 from St. Louis-area newspapers highlighting the efforts of Company I and its men. An interesting document in this series is a typewritten reminiscence titled “The Diary of a St. Louis Doughboy” by Private Al. J. Westing of Company I, most likely written in 1919. This 45-page reminiscence, written in verse, relates the author’s experiences during his period of active service, and colorfully details the soldiers’ daily lives, from the gas and trenches of front-line duty to the endless marching, training, and waiting while fighting body lice and enjoying French wines.

Materials from the company’s postwar **Reunion Association Series** constitute the single largest series in the collection. Among these are a number of specialized and general membership lists for the period 1930 to 1973. The specialized lists include a list of reunion chairmen (with deceased chairmen noted), reunion and picnic locations, and number attending for the years 1930 to 1969. In addition, there are four partial and complete lists of deceased Company I veterans; many of the entries on these lists are annotated with the veterans’ places of burial.

The general membership lists include lists of local and/or out-of-town veterans of Company I for the years 1935, 1937, 1938, 1943 (updated from 1941 list), 1961 (updated from 1955 list), 1966 through 1971, and 1973.

The majority of material in this series documents the group’s activities between 1934 and 1948, and includes minutes of meetings, announcements, and reports of events and annual reunions,

printed tickets for social events, and press clippings about Company I and its veterans. The series contains printed items including a song from the 1926 reunion, a ticket from a 1933 dance, a 1955 invitation to a memorial service for the commander of the 138th Infantry, and commemorative items for two deceased Company I veterans. The series also contains newspaper clippings that deal mostly with the veterans as individuals rather than as an organized group. A final folder in the series contains bills and receipts dated 1968 to 1976 from florists, printers, and restaurants who provided services to the group.

The **1921 Funeral of Captain Alexander R. Skinker Series** documents the St. Louis funeral of Captain A.R. Skinker, Company I's commanding officer and winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor. The series consists primarily of correspondence among the event's planners and the funeral participants. This correspondence falls into two time periods: January to April and August to September 1921. An enclosure to a September 9, 1921, letter from H.D. McBride, chairman of the Arrangements Committee, provides a detailed schedule of events for the funeral. Also included in this series are a biography of Captain Skinker, written circa 1923 by his father, Thomas K. Skinker; a program from the 1918 commemoration service for Captain Skinker; press clippings from 1918 to 1921 dealing with Captain Skinker's heroic actions and his funeral; and a cemetery map showing the location of his grave.

Active Duty Series

Folder 1

1917 Oct-1919 Apr History of Company I, 138th Infantry, 35th Division, American Expeditionary Force. (1 item)

Folder 2

After 1919 May Typed manuscript of "The Diary of a St. Louis Doughboy," written in verse by a member of Company I, 138th Infantry, 35th Division, American Expeditionary Force, while serving in France. (1 item)

Folder 3

1918-1919 Press clippings regarding Company I, 138th Infantry, 35th Division, American Expeditionary Force. (16 items)

Reunion Association Series

Folder 4

1930-1971 Specialized membership lists (1930-1971) and general membership lists (1935-1961) for Company I, 138th Infantry, 35th Division, American Expeditionary Force reunions. (13 items)

Folder 5

1966-1973 General membership lists for Company I, 138th Infantry, 35th Division, American Expeditionary Force reunions. (13 items)

Folder 6

1934-1937 Activities relating to Company I, 138th Infantry, 35th Division, American Expeditionary Force reunions. (38 items)

Folder 7

1938-1942 Activities relating to Company I, 138th Infantry, 35th Division, American Expeditionary Force reunions. (36 items)

Folder 8

1943-1948 Activities for Company I, 138th Infantry, 35th Division, American Expeditionary Force reunions (22 items)

Folder 9

1926-1971; no date Printed materials (1926, 1933, 1955, 1970) and press clippings (1962, 1965, 1967, 1969-1971, undated). (21 items)

Folder 10

1968-1976 Bills and receipts relating to Company I, 138th Infantry, 35th Division, American Expeditionary Force reunions. (37 items)

Folder 11
1937 Aug 21 Souvenir Program for the Sixth Annual Reunion of Battery A of the 138th
Infantry, held in St. Louis, Mo. Contains a history of the infantry. (1 item)

1921 Funeral of Captain Alexander R. Skinker Series

Folder 12
circa 1923 Typed biography of A. R. Skinker. (1 item)

Folder 13
1921 Jan-Apr Correspondence regarding the funeral for A. R. Skinker. (26 items)

Folder 14
1921 Aug Correspondence regarding the funeral for A. R. Skinker. (16 items)

Folder 15
1921 Sept Correspondence regarding the funeral for A. R. Skinker. (34 items)

Folder 16
1918, 1921 Printed materials and press clippings relating to A. R. Skinker's funeral.
(24 items)