



The New York Public Library
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,
Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

William Holmes Dyer memoirs

1917-1918

Summary

Creator: Dyer, William Holmes

Title: William Holmes Dyer memoirs

Date: 1917-1918

Size: .2 linear feet (1 volume)

Source: Brummel, Shirley,; 1987 Gift, Shirley Brummel, 12/--/1987

Abstract: The memoirs are written in a narrative form, and begin at the point that Dyer decided to enlist in the Army, through the Armistice, his return to the States and discharge from the Army. Dyer briefly discusses the period spent at Ft. Des Moines and Camp Funston and the voyage to France. He gives his impressions of the people and his surroundings in Brest, France where his Division landed, and other cities and towns where they traveled as they made their way to the Western Front. Once at the front he describes some of his experiences there, which are also impressionistic. There are no descriptions of battles, only of the death and destruction caused by the bombings and battles. He barely discusses his medical duties, makes some mention of racial incidents and the existence of segregation and racism in the Army.

Conditions Governing Use: Photocopying restricted to transcripts

Alternative Form Available: Transcript available

Preferred citation: William Holmes Dyer memoirs, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

Creator History

William Holmes Dyer was an African-American physician in Kansas who served in World War I. While in Kansas he was a member of the staff at Old General Hospital and was the medical examiner for Standard Life Insurance Company. Dyer was appointed a First Lieutenant in the Medical Reserve Corps of the 92nd Division, which saw action in France. He was trained at the special training camp for black officers at Ft. Des Moines, Iowa and was later assigned to the 317th Sanitary Train at Camp Funston, Kansas. In June of 1918 he set sail for France.

Scope and Content Note

The memoirs are written in a narrative form, and begin at the point that Dyer decided to enlist in the Army, through the Armistice, his return to the States and discharge from the Army. Dyer briefly discusses the period spent at Ft. Des Moines and Camp Funston and the voyage to France. He gives his impressions of the people and his surroundings in Brest, France where his Division landed, and other cities and towns where they traveled as they made their way to the Western Front. Once at the front he describes some of his experiences there, which are also impressionistic. There are no descriptions of battles, only of the death and destruction caused by the bombings and battles. He barely discusses his medical duties, makes some mention of racial incidents and the existence of segregation and racism in the Army. The memoir is handwritten and bound. Pasted into the volume are photographs of soldiers at Camps Funston and Riley in Kansas, and postcards from France, a New York Times clipping "Buffaloes Return Colors from War." Also included are memoranda from Headquarters, 92nd Division, copies of circulars from the 317th Ammunition Train, and his orders from the War Department. A photograph of Dyer is located on the page fronting the section titled "Brest, France." A transcription of the memoirs accompanies the manuscript.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American physicians
African American soldiers
Race discriminationxUnited States
Soldiers -- United States -- Diaries
World War, 1914-1918 -- African Americans
World War, 1914-1918 -- Personal narratives, American

Geographic Names

Brest (France) -- Social life and customs

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Diaries
Memoirs
Photographs

Names

Dyer, William Holmes
United States. Army