Military Collection State Archives of North Carolina

William B. Duncan Papers (WWI 114)

[World War I]

Collection Number: WWI 114

Title: William B. Duncan Papers

Dates: 1914, 1917-1919, undated

Creator: William B. Duncan

Abstract

The William B. Duncan Papers is composed of wartime diary pages, a photograph, an original copy of General Pershing's Letter to Departing Officers of the A.E.F., and German and French wartime currency notes, documenting the World War I service of William B. Duncan of Raleigh, N.C., Duncan served as a Lieutenant in the 113th Field Artillery, 30th Division, U.S. Army, from 1917 to 1919. The most significant item in the collection are the 17 staple-bound wartime diary pages, removed years ago from a pocket diary, which document Duncan's time with the U.S. Army of Occupation in France and Luxembourg between December 8 and 13, 1918. These pages offer a rare insight into the post-war situation of the two countries. Duncan describes his unit's travels, where he resides, local residents, encounters with German prisoners of war, and other happenings.

The collection contains an original photograph taken of Duncan while he was in Colmar-Usines, Luxembourg, in December 1918. There are also foreign paper currency notes from France and Germany, and some of the currency notes have pencil notes by William B. Duncan on them—including the dates and locations he collected the currency.

Physical Description: 4 folders.

Language(s): English

Repository

State Archives of North Carolina, 4614 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, N.C. 27699-4614

Restrictions on Access: There are no restrictions on accessing this collection.

Restrictions on Use: There are no restrictions on the use of this collection.

Preferred Citation

[Item name or title], [Folder Numbers], William B. Duncan Papers, WWI 114, WWI Papers, Military Collection, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, N.C.

Acquisition

The collection was received by the Military Collection at the State Archives of North Carolina from Margaret Duncan of Raleigh, N.C., daughter of William B. Duncan, in June 2001, with the donation completed in June 2003.

Processing Information

The materials in this collection were originally organized in one folder without any specific groupings. The collection was reprocessed from its prior arrangement and storage in order to separate the materials in the collection into smaller groups by format, to allow for better long-term preservation of the collection. The diary pages, which were pulled out of a bound pocket diary prior to coming to the State Archives, are stapled with a thick rusting staple that could not be removed without causing damage to the pages. The staples were left as they were, also, to maintain the unnumbered diary pages' original order. To preserve the bound diary pages, they were placed in an acid-free, white archival envelope to protect it during handling and in storage, so that it does not shift too much in the folder while stored in the archival box.

The foreign paper currency is from France and Germany, and some of the currency notes have pencil notes by William B. Duncan on them—including the dates he collected the currency. To protect these small currency notes and keep them from sliding around in the archival folders, the currency notes were placed in acid-free, archival plastic photograph sleeves made of polypropylene. The sleeves will also keep the writing preserved from being rubbed off during handling.

The photograph in the collection has been individually stored in an acid-free, archival plastic sleeves to allow for researchers to handle the original image without causing damage to the image's surface, and to improve preservation during long-term storage. The photograph has been numbered with a soft HB No. 2 pencil on the back, according to the collection number, the folder number, and an individual image number. For example, the number "WWI 114.F2.1" should be interpreted as "WWI 114 collection, Folder 2, Photograph 1." The identification of this image has been created in the finding aid, but not written on the photograph itself.

Processed by: Matthew M. Peek, February 2018.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged by format of the materials in folders.

Biographical Note

William Benjamin Duncan (Jr.) (named for his grandfather) was born on January 6, 1893, in the town of Beaufort in Carteret County, N.C., to Edward Carl and Carrie King Duncan. Carrie Duncan died by 1900, leaving Edward Duncan to raise four young children on his own. Edward Duncan was appointed the Collector of Customs of the Port of Beaufort, N.C., in 1890, in which position he served until 1894. He was elected to the North Carolina legislature for 1895 and 1897 sessions. In 1898, Edward Duncan was appointed the Collector of Internal Revenue in Raleigh, N.C.

On November 11, 1903, Edward Duncan married Alma C. Speight in Wayne County, N.C., and the new Duncan family would come to live on East Lane Street in downtown Raleigh, N.C., by 1910. In 1908, Duncan resigned from Collector of Internal Revenue to become one of the Receivers for the Seaboard Air Line Railway. In 1908, he was picked as one of five men for a subcommittee which managed the 1908 presidential campaign of William Howard Taft.

A strong Republican political figure in Raleigh, Edward Duncan was a member of the North Carolina Republican Convention that hotly debated their support of William Howard Taft for Republican Presidential candidate in 1912, or accept overtures from Teddy Roosevelt's Bull Moose Party. Duncan was the Republican National Committeeman from North Carolina for the 1920 Republican National Convention in Chicago. In total, Edward Duncan was a Republican delegate from North Carolina to the Republican National Conventions in 1896, 1900, 1904, 1912, 1916, and 1920. Edward Duncan would become a director for the Norfolk Southern Railroad Company. He also was a director for the Commercial National Bank in Raleigh at the time of his death.

William B. Duncan attended college at Trinity College (part of present-day Duke University) in Durham, N.C., where he studied law. Duncan was attending the school from 1911 through 1914. In the summer of 1911, William Duncan was chosen for a summer position with the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries' biological laboratory in Beaufort, N.C. Duncan suffered from appendicitis in July 1912, and had emergency surgery in New Bern, N.C., from which he recovered. Duncan began practicing law in 1915 with fellow Trinity College Law School graduate Willis Smith, as the two men setup practice in Raleigh. By the time of his draft registration for World War I, William Duncan was living and working in Raleigh as an attorney as a member of the firm Smith & Duncan, with their offices based in the Citizens National Bank Building in the city.

After the United States entered World War I in April 1917, William B. Duncan enlisted in the North Carolina National Guard on July 24, 1917, in Raleigh, N.C. He would be initially assigned to the National Guard's Signal Corps. Duncan was transferred as a Private to Company H, 113th Infantry. Duncan was honorably discharged on November 27, 1917, in order to accept an officer's commission as a 2nd Lieutenant in the U.S. Army with a field artillery unit on November 28, 1917. Duncan was assigned to the 113th Field Artillery, 30th Division, U.S. Army, in which unit he would remain through the end of his military service.

Duncan was assigned with his unit at Camp Sevier, S.C. He was promoted to the rank of 1st Lieutenant on December 26, 1917. Duncan and his unit left the United States on a troop transport

ship for overseas service in Europe on May 27, 1918. He was involved in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive in the fall of 1918. After the Armistice in November 1918, Duncan's unit was assigned to occupation duty in Europe, specifically in the small country of Luxembourg. On December 13, 1918, Duncan's unit arrived in the town of Reckange, Luxembourg. By December 29, 1918, Duncan was stationed in Colmar-Usines, Luxembourg.

William Duncan left from France and arrived in the United States on March 18, 1919, at Newport News, Virginia. He disembarked and sent to Camp Stuart in Newport News, from which he and his unit were sent to Camp Jackson, S.C. William Duncan was honorably discharged from active military service at Camp Jackson on March 28, 1919.

By 1920, Duncan had returned to his family's Raleigh home, and had begun working as a lawyer in a general practice. His father Edward Duncan died on August 29, 1920, in Beaufort, N.C., leaving William as executor of his will and estate. In 1921, William Duncan was one of two main candidates to be nominated in October 1921 by newly-elected President Warren G. Harding as the Collector of Internal Revenue for North Carolina; but, he lost out on the position to Gilliam Grissom of Greensboro, N.C., then secretary of the North Carolina Republican Committee.

In lieu of this position, President Harding was reported to be ready to appoint William Duncan as the North Carolina representative for the U.S. Veterans Bureau. He declined this position, intending to fight for the Collector of Internal Revenue position—a position which his father had held in Raleigh for a number of years. In order to take care of the son of a long-time important Republican supporter of President Harding, it was rumored in October 1921 that North Carolina would be divided into two regional revenue collecting areas, for which Duncan would be appointed to the Eastern District. By 1922, William Duncan was serving as the acting postmaster for Raleigh, N.C. According to the 1922 *Congressional Record*, Duncan was approved as postmaster for Raleigh by August 1922.

William Duncan married Margaret Dale Calvert in Raleigh, N.C., on June 9, 1923. Duncan continued working as both a lawyer and postmaster in Raleigh through the 1930s, and was a lawyer for the remainder of his life. William B. Duncan died on October 31, 1953, in Raleigh, N.C., and was buried in Oakwood Cemetery in the same city.

Scope and Content

The collection is composed of wartime diary pages, a photograph, an original copy of General Pershing's Letter to Departing Officers of the A.E.F., and German and French wartime currency notes, documenting the World War I service of William B. Duncan of Raleigh, N.C., Duncan served as a Lieutenant in the 113th Field Artillery, 30th Division, U.S. Army, from 1917 to 1919. The most significant item in the collection are the 17 staple-bound wartime diary pages, removed years ago from a pocket diary, which document Duncan's time with the U.S. Army of Occupation in France and Luxembourg between December 8 and 13, 1918. These pages offer a rare insight into the post-war situation of the two countries. Duncan describes his unit's travels, where he resides, local residents, encounters with German prisoners of war, and other happenings.

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Subject Terms

Persons/Families

Duncan, William B. (William Benjamin), 1893-1953

Places

Beaufort (N.C.) Carteret County (N.C.) Raleigh (N.C.) Wake County (N.C.)

Subject—Topical

Trinity College (Durham, N.C.)
United States. Army. Division, 30th
United States. Army. Field Artillery Regiment, 113th

Material Types

Currencies Diaries Photographs

Collection Inventory

Folder	Description	Date
1	Wartime Diary Pages	December 1918
2	Photograph	December 29, 1918

WWI 114.F1.1: Photograph of 1st Lt. William B. Duncan of Raleigh, N.C., wearing his full Army uniform, posing outside on a stone patio or balcony of a house in Colmar-Usines, Luxembourg on December 29, 1918. Duncan was stationed there on occupation duty during World War I as part of the U.S. Army of Occupation, serving in 13th Field Artillery, 30th Division, U.S. Army (December 29, 1918).

3	General Pershing's Letter to Departing Officers of the A.E.F.	1919
4	European Currencies	1914, 1917-1918