



---

Volume 20

Article 5

---

2014

## Growing Up in the Trenches: Fritz Draper Hurd and the Great War

S. Marianne Johnson  
*Gettysburg College*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/ach>

 Part of the [Military History Commons](#), [Public History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

**Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.**

---

Johnson, S. Marianne (2014) "Growing Up in the Trenches: Fritz Draper Hurd and the Great War," *Adams County History*: Vol. 20 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/ach/vol20/iss1/5>

This open access article is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact [cupola@gettysburg.edu](mailto:cupola@gettysburg.edu).

---

# Growing Up in the Trenches: Fritz Draper Hurd and the Great War

## **Abstract**

On February 18, 1919, Second Lieutenant Fritz Draper Hurd supervised recreational activities for the men of the 103rd Field Artillery. The men breathed easy; they tossed a football and even engaged in a little gallows humor with a “gas mask race,” at last finding a use for the once fearsome yet no longer needed device. The Great War was over, and the men of the 103rd Field Artillery were content to lob footballs instead of shells as they awaited their discharge papers. [*excerpt*]

## **Keywords**

Adams County Historical Society, ACHS, Adams County, Pennsylvania History, World War I, WWI, Great War, War Memory, Home Front, Veteran, Enlistment, Patriotism, Gettysburg College, Pennsylvania College

## **Growing up in the Trenches: Fritz Draper Hurd and the Great War**

**S. MARIANNE JOHNSON**

On February 18, 1919, Second Lieutenant Fritz Draper Hurd supervised recreational activities for the men of the 103<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery. The men breathed easy; they tossed a football and even engaged in a little gallows humor with a “gas mask race,” at last finding a use for the once fearsome yet no longer needed device. The Great War was over, and the men of the 103<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery were content to lob footballs instead of shells as they awaited their discharge papers.

In 2012, Hurd’s alma mater, Gettysburg College, acquired the veteran’s diary, a scrapbook documenting his wartime achievements, and the transcript of a memoir an aging Hurd dictated in 1976. Supporting these three items are remarkable pieces of Western Front ephemera: an unopened first aid kit; the musette bag he used as an officer; a trench knife complete with brass knuckles on the hilt; letters; pamphlets; photographs; and a beautifully knitted pair of socks.<sup>45</sup> Taken together, the collection offers a glimpse into a coming of age story typical of an average American college student during the First World War.

---

45 Similar memory studies include David Glassberg, and J. Michael Moore, “Patriotism in Orange: The Memory of World War I In a Massachusetts Town,” in *Bonds of Affection: Americans Define Their Patriotism*. ed. John Bodnar (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1996); Andrew Fletcher, “Patriotism, Identity, and Commemoration: New Light on the Great War from the Papers of Major Reggie Chenevix Trench,” *Journal of the Association of History* 90, no. 300 (October 2005) 532-549 and Marshall, R. Jackson. *Memories of World War I: North Carolina Doughboys on the Western Front* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1998).

The conventional wisdom about First World War soldiers is that they were victims: members of a “Lost Generation” who were sacrificed to the whims of politicians, ineffective generals, and a militaristic war culture indifferent to their suffering.<sup>46</sup> Trudging to the front in search of adventure, historians argue that these men found only mud and horrific death. Furthermore, scholars allege that when these men returned home, they encountered a civilian population who could never understand. They returned broken and unable to assimilate back into everyday life; seemingly caught in transition, they were powerless to forget the past.<sup>47</sup>

Recent research, however, has begun to resist this framework of futility. Dan Todman demonstrated that negative myths of the Great War prevailed because they were useful to anti-war protesters during the Cold War and Vietnam War.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, Hew Strachan and Alan Kramer argued that the war to its generation was in no way one without purpose or meaning.<sup>49</sup> Finally, research into soldier morale and experience

---

46 Joe Lunn, “Male Identity and Martial Codes of Honor: A Comparison of the War Memoirs of Robert Graves, Ernst Jünger, and Kande Kamara,” *The Journal of Military History* 69, no. 3 (July 2005), 721.

47 Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 8; Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 187-189; Eric Leed, *No Man’s Land: Combat & Identity in World War I* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 210-213.

48 Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (New York: Hambleton Continuum, 2005), 204.

49 Strachan has argued vehemently against the futility myth.

by Alexander Watson suggests that endurance was more common than collapse, and that a majority of soldiers were able to cope with their experiences.<sup>50</sup>

The story of Fritz Draper Hurd resonates with the work of these scholars; the Great War transformed this troublesome college boy into a man in an officer's uniform. Serving for twenty-seven months on the Western Front, first as a medical nurse and later as a Second Lieutenant in the 103<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery, 26<sup>th</sup> Division, Hurd returned from the battlefields of France with a greater degree of patriotism. He learned how to cope with his experiences, remembered them fondly, and moved beyond the Western Front to a successful career as a physician. For Hurd, the Great War was decidedly a story of redemption.

---

Both Kramer and Strachan have argued that the German and Austro-Hungarian High Commands were permeated by a Social Darwinist fatalism, which held that a nation must prove itself in war, and that some nations were ethnically inferior to others. These views translated into brutal "civilizing" policies and even genocide on the Balkan front. Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 42. Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 47, 81, 83, 93, 150.

50 Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 6-7. Other frameworks for viewing the Great War include: Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18: Understanding the Great War*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002); Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 129-130, 137; Leed, *No Man's Land*, 45, 156-158, 160-161.

## From Fraternity to Front Lines

Fritz Draper Hurd was born in Clear Springs, Maryland, on August 6, 1894, to parents who operated two local drugstores.<sup>51</sup> He engaged in the pranks and practical jokes typical of boyhood, recalling that he was “seldom a ringleader but an excellent follower.”<sup>52</sup> In 1912, Hurd enrolled at Pennsylvania College (now Gettysburg College), where he joined the Sigma Chi fraternity. Hurd adored the school and felt at home in the historic town. During the summer of 1913, he watched the tottering “old soldiers” return to the fields they had fought over fifty years before.<sup>53</sup> Hurd maintained an active schedule. In addition to playing tennis, football, and baseball, he organized dances and social events for his fraternity.<sup>54</sup>

In 1914, as Europe descended into war, the students and citizens in Adams County took little notice.<sup>55</sup> Hurd and his friends, Keller Rockey and Lloyd Schaeffer, contented themselves by skipping class and playing pranks in the Lutheran Chapel, not knowing that they and almost three hundred of their fellow Gettysburgians would soon be fighting men in France.<sup>56</sup> On the eve of his graduation, Hurd, who had

---

51 Hurd, Memoir, 1.

52 Hurd, Memoir, 10.

53 Fritz Draper Hurd, 1913 Diary, June 29-July 4, 1913.

54 Hurd, 1913 Diary. Hurd, 1914 Diary.

55 Although *The Gettysburg Times* did note in passing the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie, news coverage was almost nonexistent in a serious way until after the first battle of Ypres in October, two months after the war started. *Gettysburg Times*, accessed via GoogleNews Archive.

56 “Roll of Honor,” Gettysburg College 1920 *Spectrum*, Special Collections. Keller Rockey was falsely reported dead at the

earned something of a reputation for delinquency, was caught in a beastly state of intoxication smashing furniture; he was immediately expelled.<sup>57</sup>

After his expulsion, Hurd returned home. His father refused to speak to him and demanded that he find a job—lest anyone discover what had happened. With twenty dollars in his pocket, Hurd went to Philadelphia looking for work; he found it at the Eddystone Remington Arms Company, where he helped to manufacture Enfield rifles for the British Army.<sup>58</sup> In the spring of 1917, he tracked the progress of the U.S. Senate debate over intervention in his diary, finally exclaiming in April: “War declared on Germany!!”<sup>59</sup> Almost immediately after the United States entered the war, Hurd and one of his Gettysburg classmates, Paul Crider, enlisted in a hospital unit forming in Philadelphia. Reflecting on his enlistment motivation, he made a vague reference to patriotism, but also reported that enlisting was “the thing to do.”<sup>60</sup>

---

front, but would survive and return to his beloved Gettysburg. Lloyd Schaeffer became an aviator; he was awarded the Croix de Guerre by the French after his plane was riddled with machine gun fire. “Captain Rockey Found Alive,” *Gettysburg Times*, July 16, 1918; “Back With Many Holes in Plane,” *Gettysburg Times*, August 28, 1918; “Croix de Guerre for College Man,” *Gettysburg Times* September 26, 1918.

57 Hurd, Memoir, c-12-a. Hurd would later petition the college and receive his diploma on Dec. 23, 1916; The College faculty ruled that Hurd’s diploma would be suspended until December 1, 1916, and then awarded. September 20, 1916 Faculty Minutes, Special Collections.

58 Hurd, Memoir, w1.

59 Hurd, Diary Entry April 6, 1917.

60 Hurd, Memoir, w3.



*Fritz Draper Hurd, Gettysburg College Class of 1916, and a 2nd Lieutenant in the US Army Expeditionary Forces during World War I. Courtesy of Special Collections & College Archives, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.*

On May 15, 1917, Hurd received sailing orders and was given twenty-four hours to say goodbye to his family. Three days later, Hurd and his hospital company (which consisted of nearly two hundred and fifty doctors, nurses, and enlisted men) embarked from Hoboken, New Jersey. While boarding the ship, Hurd noticed a sign announcing the implementation of a draft. He recollected that he and Crider were “proud of the fact that they were being patriotic” and had volunteered



instead of being conscripted.<sup>61</sup> Upon arriving in Liverpool, Hurd's unit received a week of training, mostly in stretcher drill, before leaving for France.<sup>62</sup> The passage to France and the introduction to army life were especially difficult. His first army meal included chicken too hard to bite and a potato concealing a cockroach. Nonetheless, he recalled with pride the fact that he was one of the first five hundred Americans to step foot in France, and purported to be the first in his unit to see the French coast.<sup>63</sup> In his diary on June 10, 1917, he wrote: "Landed in France as representative of my government in this world wide struggle."<sup>64</sup>

### **Recording, Remembering, and Defining War Experience: Medical Memories**

The differences between Hurd's diary and what he remembered as he dictated his memoir in the 1970s shed light on how the meaning of the war shifted for Hurd as he aged. The memoir is extremely sanitized; his recollections of action, for instance, are reduced to a series of humorous anecdotes. The memoir reads in a very conversational way; it is likewise littered with inaccuracies. Later in life, Hurd was less worried about writing a factual account of his war service and more concerned with constructing a useable legacy.<sup>65</sup>

---

61 Hurd, Memoir, w3-4.

62 Hurd, Diary Entry, June 6, 1917, Hurd Collection.

63 Hurd, Memoir, w4. Hurd was on deck in the early morning hours because he could not stand sleeping below decks with the stench of the army mules travelling with them.

64 Hurd, Memoranda, Diary, Hurd Collection.

65 Alexander Watson has argued in *Enduring the Great War* that on the whole, soldiers of the Great War were able to cope with

Arriving in France before the AEF combat divisions, Hurd was assigned to the hospital in Rouen to care for wounded British soldiers in the “penetrating chest ward.” Hurd did not enjoy his time in the unit (“everybody in there was running pus,” he recalled).<sup>66</sup> His many duties included scrubbing floors, cleaning bedpans, and assisting nurses with patients who were injured in places “where nurses ordinarily aren’t supposed to be treating them.”<sup>67</sup>

Hurd was next transferred to the amputation ward. He preferred this assignment because he did not “get so much pus coughed in my face and eyes and it just was cleaner and better work.”<sup>68</sup> Rather than recount gruesome details or heaps of dismembered limbs, Hurd safely remembered the experience in his memoir by using humor. He recalled, for instance, a Scottish soldier carried into the amputation ward with an injured leg. The soldier, Alan Morrison, donned a makeshift splint fashioned from an old box, neatly lettered with the word ‘BACON.’<sup>69</sup> By focusing on the bacon box, Hurd distracted readers from the sobering reality of Morrison’s mangled leg.

The discussion of the penetrating chest ward is the most graphic portion of Hurd’s memoir, but even its language is more clinical than emotional. Dictating his memoir as an eighty-four year old man at the close of a long and successful medical

---

and endure the Western Front. These coping mechanisms include, but were not limited to, the use of gallows humor, fatalism, repression, superstition, etc. See chapter three in Watson, *Enduring the Great War*.

66 Hurd, Memoir, w6.

67 Hurd, Memoir, w6.

68 Hurd, Memoir, w8.

69 Hurd, Memoir, w8.

career, the impersonal medical terms he used to describe the penetrating chest wound are perhaps not surprising. Rather than horrifying, overwritten descriptions of terrible wounds, Hurd matter-of-factly stated, “I had very valuable experience here, at least, in seeing very sick accident cases.”<sup>70</sup> By time of Hurd dictated the memoir, he had been in the medical field for nearly forty years. Twenty-two year old Hurd, on the other hand, reacted much differently to Base Hospital #10. “We newcomers are certainly filled with horror when confronted with these cases of legs and arms off, men paralyzed, blind, etc., by shrapnel. Every one of the wounded are good brave men and stand the almost impossible pain with the greatest of gameness.”<sup>71</sup>

By March 1918, Hurd began to display signs of fatigue and discomfort. On March 8, he wrote, “Getting fed up with my work.”<sup>72</sup> A few weeks later, Hurd’s March 21 entry reads only, “Germans start offensive on 50 mile front.”<sup>73</sup> This extreme understatement refers to the German Spring 1918 *Kaiserschlacht*, a massive offensive that overran the British lines and captured ninety eight and a half square miles of territory, breaking the static lines in an impressive advance. The entire operation cost the Allies approximately 212,000 casualties.<sup>74</sup> Hurd “worked his head off” with almost no rest for several days as convoy after convoy of wounded British men flooded into

---

70 Hurd, Memoir, w7.

71 Scrapbook, Hurd Collection.

72 Hurd, Diary Entry March 8, 1918.

73 Hurd, Diary Entry March 21, 1918.

74 Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, 174-175.

the hospital.<sup>75</sup> On March 23, they had to move their hospital tents back because the Germans were bombarding them and had come within seventy-five miles of Paris.<sup>76</sup>

In the memoir, Hurd vaguely cited the pangs of guilt he felt upon seeing wounded British soldiers (“some little five-foot fellows”) coming in from the front. “It made us great big healthy, strapping Americans almost feel ashamed of ourselves that these people were up at the Front Line actually protecting us,” he explained.<sup>77</sup> Such feelings ultimately persuaded Hurd to seek a combat commission. Even as convoys of wounded were still arriving from the *Kaiserchlaect* offensive, Hurd left for artillery officer’s training school. The letter he wrote home to his mother explaining his decision was published in the local newspaper. The letter began: “Other mother’s sons are dying by the thousands just now, and I know that I must go out and take my turn with the rest.”<sup>78</sup> Hurd felt that he had a moral obligation to contribute to the cause in a more active way.<sup>79</sup>

Why did Hurd feel that he had to enlist in a frontline capacity? Hurd’s conception of masculinity is an important facet. He expressed guilt over being a nurse, treating men he regarded as physiologically inferior while he remained behind the lines in relative safety. An interesting insight from the scrapbook adds weight to this argument. The scrapbook is arranged

---

75 Hurd, Diary Entry March 22-23, 1918.

76 Hurd, Diary Entry March 22-23, 1918.

77 Hurd, Memoir, w9. Hurd was not alone in his characterization of Americans as larger and healthier. Vera Brittain and Eric Remarque drew on the same stereotype in their respective works, *Testament of Youth* and *The Road Back*.

78 Scrapbook, Hurd Collection.

79 Hynes, *A Soldier’s Tale*, 50-51; Rouzeau, 14-18, 100-102.

chronologically; it shifts from documenting wild college days to chronicling the feats of a war hero with the flip of a page. Yet news clippings regarding his time in the medial service are pasted a few pages later—seemingly as an afterthought. At the time Hurd was pasting together his scrapbook, his success as an artillery officer and his Lieutenant’s rank meant far more to him than his time as a nurse.

Insights from his diary and letters give the impression that Hurd was perhaps a better nurse than he gave himself credit for. He attempted to alleviate the boredom and gloom of his ward, understanding that his patients needed a distraction from their suffering. He organized theatrical productions for the entertainment of the men—even starring in leading roles on “stage.” He did what he could to help the men pass the time. On Christmas Eve 1917, he and “Dutch” Crider, the schoolmate who enlisted with him, walked four miles to find the Christmas decorations they used to embellish their ward. He seems to have taken it as a personal charge to not only treat wounds, but cheer his patients. Sister Robelen, who tended to the spiritual needs of the wounded, took it upon herself to write Hurd’s mother to tell her of her “splendidly brave” son.<sup>80</sup> Robelen wrote that Hurd had been “a wonderful help to me with his cheerful disposition and sunny smile. He seems to radiate cheerfulness and to pass it on to others. Your son has done excellent work over here and I feel that you should know it.”<sup>81</sup>

---

80 Letter from Miss Robelen to Anna Hurd, Fritz Draper Hurd Collection, Special Collections, Gettysburg College.

81 Diary and Scrapbook, Fritz Draper Hurd Collection, Special Collections, Gettysburg College. Letter from Miss Robelen to Anna Hurd, Fritz Draper Hurd Collection, Special Collections, Gettysburg College.

## **Recording, Remembering, and Defining War Experience: Martial Memories**

After receiving his transfer, Hurd was sent to the Samur Artillery School of Instruction, where he spent time “riding a horse bareback...tearing around the place learning to be an officer.”<sup>82</sup> While in training, the Germans began their assault on the Aisne from May 27 to June 5. Hurd received his commission as a Second Lieutenant in the Field Artillery on the tenth of July and arrived on the front just in time for the German offensive on Champagne-Marne, from July 15 to July 18. He described his introduction to the Western Front this way: “Of course, being at night, the very lights were going up and lots of activities—shells were going off—and I was out as an officer learning.”<sup>83</sup> In his diary, he described going to Division headquarters and, afterwards, out to his battalion, where he was “Bombed by the Boche+ just a little disturbed.”<sup>84</sup>

In the memoir, Hurd summarized his artillery service with a few spry anecdotes and precious little detail. The first night he reported for duty to his new artillery unit, he noticed one man with a Sigma Chi fraternity shield. This man was a fellow officer who had graduated from Purdue University; the two became “fast friends.”<sup>85</sup> For a young man just being

---

82 Hurd, *Memoir*, w10.

83 Hurd, *Memoir*, w10.

84 Diary Entry July 19, 1918. Fritz Draper Hurd Collection, Special Collections, Gettysburg College.

85 Hurd, *Memoir*, w10.

introduced to the Western Front in the middle of a German assault, the familiar sight of his fraternity shield provided comfort and served as a symbol of comradeship and familiarity in the midst of chaos.<sup>86</sup>

Hurd's job as a liaison officer involved making contact with the infantry his unit supported. It was a "dirty and dangerous" job.<sup>87</sup> He often went for days without seeing anyone in his unit, "bumming" food from civilians along the way.<sup>88</sup> Hurd first saw action during the drive on the St. Mihiel salient in early September 1918. St. Mihiel was a two hundred square mile salient just south of Verdun. Its base was hilly and wooded, but culminated in a 1,000 foot cliff called the Heights of the Meuse. Germans had held the ground since 1914, but were pulling out by the time of the Allied advance.<sup>89</sup>

On September 12, a half million Americans and one hundred and ten thousand French troops set out to capture the salient. Other soldiers from the campaign related grisly tales of cat-sized rats wriggling amidst skulls and rotting corpses that littered the battlefields. Describing the bombardment, one soldier said, "heads and limbs and torsos were seen scattered all over the ground where company L had been."<sup>90</sup> Gas attacks

---

86 Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, 66.

87 Hurd, Memoir, w12.

88 Hurd, Memoir, w13.

89 Hurd, Memoir, w11; Michael Shay, *The Yankee Division in the First World War: In the Highest Tradition* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 148. *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 1, 2013).

90 Edward C. Lukens, *A Blue Ridge Memoir* (Baltimore: Sun Print, 1922), 59 as quoted in Edward Lengel, *To Conquer Hell: The Meuse-Argonne, 1918* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2008),

were particularly dreadful; mustard gas caused painful blisters, burning and swelling of the eyes, and bleeding and blistering of the lungs. Phosgene gas could literally dissolve lungs after being inhaled.<sup>91</sup>

Hurd mentioned none of these horrors in his memoir. One partial explanation for this glaring omission is that an artilleryman's battle experience was fundamentally different than that of an infantryman's. Although manning the guns and engaging in counter-battery fire was harrowing, artillerymen were not going over the top and charging across shell pocked terrain.<sup>92</sup> On the other hand, as a liaison officer, Hurd's situation was a bit different. He remained constantly in support of the front lines and found himself under fire from machine guns on more than one occasion. Once again, Hurd defused the horror of such incidents with humor. He recalled that while out on a wire-laying mission, he stored a few cookies inside his gas mask. A few days later, Hurd opened the mask to find that his cookies had been crushed:

*...in a couple of days I opened my gas mask and here were my cookies all powdered! I had fallen so many times because when we heard machine guns start going, we would hit the ground. We didn't want to be a target for them. As a matter of fact, I was a target for a machine gunner for any number of rounds before I knew what was going on. I heard this peculiar sound like somebody was hitting a wire with a stick—"ding, ding, ding." Well, there were not wires around there! There wasn't anything around there hardly higher than three feet off the ground and here it was machine gun bullets going by me and I didn't know it. When I*

---

91 Lengel, *To Conquer Hell*, 76.

92 Trout, *On the Battlefields of Memory*, 25.



*found that out I started learning to “hit the ground” and as I said, one time when I looked or opened by gas mask, here was a lot of chocolate candy crushed up with some almost powdered cookies. Apparently, I had fallen and hit the ground several times and crushed the cookies. It was a “hell of a thing” to do! That wasn’t any way to treat a gas mask.*<sup>93</sup>

This scene hinges as the central point of the war experiences portion of the memoir. Fumbling with his gas mask and the cookies is the only time one gets a strong picture of Hurd in action and under fire. In a conversational and humorous manner, Hurd related the scene vividly. The bemused reader is left not to ponder the machine gun rounds hissing overhead, but rather to picture the disappointment of this twenty-four year old young man lamenting the loss of his cookies.

The trench diary and newspaper clippings help to fill in the gaps of what Hurd was specifically doing during the St. Mihiel push. In a letter to his father that was reprinted in a local newspaper, Hurd wrote that he was in a forward observation post. During the nine hour barrage, he attempted to read some mail, but did not finish before the infantry began its advance. At eight o’clock on the morning of September 12, 1918, he watched the infantry climb out of the trenches to begin the attack. He tracked closely behind. There was no opposition until the infantry hit the second line of defenses; Hurd stopped to telephone his battery what he saw. For three nights, he slept in “no man’s land” with the infantry and weathered “many close calls from machine guns.”<sup>94</sup>

One other combat scene stands out in the memoir. As a

---

93 Hurd, Memoir, w13. A similar recollection by another soldier can be found in Freidel, *Over There*, 148-149.

94 Hurd, Diary Entry September 12, 1918, and Scrapbook.

liaison officer, Hurd used hydrogen-gas observation balloons to reconnoiter the German lines and to track the success of his unit.<sup>95</sup> Three days after going up in one such inflatable during the Meuse Argonne offensive, Hurd watched from the ground as a German plane downed the very balloon he had been in. Unable to remember if there were any safety features for the personnel inside the balloon to escape safely, his thoughts turned to the French pilot operating the balloon, with whom he had an awkward yet humorous exchange three days earlier. “[d] rather [believe] that this fellow, although I didn’t see him come down (I just have a hunch) ... had a method of ... getting away, if possible, before the blasé [sic] took away too much of the gas.”<sup>96</sup> This kind of rationalization has been termed “reinterpreting trauma positively.”<sup>97</sup> As psychiatrist W.H.R. Rivers discovered, men who had collapsed from mental exhaustion during the war found it easier to focus on positive or humorous aspects rather than dwell on the negative.<sup>98</sup>

When Hurd and his comrades heard the war was going to end, they were skeptical. Still, his artillery unit gathered and set off a shell with a ten second fuse just before 11:00am on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1918—and then claimed, like many men, to have fired off the last shell of the war.<sup>99</sup> Hurd’s personal armistice experience was terrible. Fumbling around in a trench, he came across some gas shells and, not knowing what they were, managed to gas himself. He wrote in his diary that he

---

95 Hurd, *Memoir*, w14-15.

96 Hurd, *Memoir*, w15.

97 Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, 90.

98 Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, 90.

99 Almost every other battery seems to have made the same claim. Freidel, *Over There*, 246-247.

thought his heart was stopping. Hurd spent several days in a French hospital at Loxerville and briefly collected a pension of eight dollars a month “on account of disability resulting from injury incurred in the line of duty while employed on active service.”<sup>100</sup> No mention was made of the accidental, self-inflicted nature of the wound, or that it happened after the armistice. Hurd saw little or no irony in the episode, and treated it as just one more war experience.

### **Post War Life: Dissection and Dancing**

After the armistice, Hurd was given the option of going home, or to a French or English University. He chose to return to England (where “they live a good free life”) and study for three months.<sup>101</sup> Hurd enjoyed immensely his time there, especially a program in which British families would invite American officers into their homes for weekend excursions. On such occasions, Hurd played tennis and attended dinner parties; he even found himself at a dinner party playing tennis at Lady Nancy Astor’s country home, Clivedon. Hurd went into more detail about English dinner protocol, descriptions of table settings, and tennis courts than any of his time on the Western Front.<sup>102</sup>

Without the war, of course, Hurd may have never had the opportunity for these experiences. Although a war is not generally viewed in terms of opportunity, it did enable the transformation of a young man expelled from college to a capable officer mingling with upper-class British society.

---

100 United States Treasury Department, Pension Receipt, Hurd Collection, Special Collections, Gettysburg College.

101 Hurd, Memoir, w20.

102 Hurd, Memoir, w21-24.

Photographs depict Hurd in a three piece-suit with a walking stick and a “Blackjack” Pershing moustache strolling down the streets of London.<sup>103</sup> This should not be taken as an overly positive endorsement of war as opportunity; to be sure, Hurd endured his share of hardship and harbored painful memories that kept him up at night—even a half a century after the event. However, incidents such as this help to confirm that some Great War memoirists were able to use their experiences to “construct an understanding of martial masculinity which acknowledges loss even as the war is presented as a life-changing event.”<sup>104</sup>

Once he returned home in 1919, Hurd experienced a period of uncertainty about what to do next.<sup>105</sup> His story bears some similarity to that of Harold Krebs, the protagonist in Ernest Hemingway’s *Soldier’s Home*, a popular short story about a veteran who returns home unable to leave his past behind him.<sup>106</sup> Unlike Krebs, however, Hurd was neither despairing nor disillusioned about his return to civilian life; he was merely dislocated. On the first anniversary of the Armistice, he joined the American Legion, a signal of how dearly he cherished the brotherly bonds he forged overseas.<sup>107</sup>

In 1920, Hurd enrolled in Harvard Medical School; his time there coincided with the opening of the 26th Yankee Division Hall. The diary entries in 1920 vary between cadaver dissection and dancing at the YD Hall. Hurd, though not a

---

103 Scrapbook, Hurd Collection.

104 Meyer, *Men of War*, 130.

105 Hurd, *Memoir*, w25.

106 Ernest Hemingway, “Soldier’s Home,” from *The Collected Stories*, ed. James Fenton (New York: Everyman’s Library, 1995).

107 Hurd, *Diary Entry* November 11, 1919.

native New Englander, fully adopted the Yankee Division identity; he continued to show pride in his war service, even as commemorations took a more somber turn.<sup>108</sup> In postwar France, as in Great Britain and in the United States, attempts to glorify the army and patriotism were increasingly viewed as affronts to the dead. Vigils, Unknown Soldier tombs, and marble tablets filled with the names of the deceased became the most common sites of remembrance.<sup>109</sup> Hurd, however, continued to frequent the YD Hall and remembered his war in a celebratory way.<sup>110</sup> One of the last photographs pasted in the scrapbook is a photograph of Hurd shortly after returning home resting on a cliff face overlooking Monument Valley in Utah. Pondering and peaceful, one leg whimsically swings over the edge of the cliff, while the other knee is drawn up to his chest. No other person appears in the photograph. So ends the scrapbook on a note of optimism and wonder about the future.

For unknown reasons, Hurd transferred to the University of Minnesota and graduated with his medical degree in 1924. He married in 1927, had seven children, and went on to practice medicine in various capacities for over fifty years. He was actively involved the USO during World War II and continued to advocate service to country to the rest of his life, even during

---

108 One item in the Hurd collection is a pamphlet recording the operational history of the Yankee Division in which Hurd annotated the margins with phrases like “I was there” or “I fought here.” One somewhat humorous annotation deals with an incident where forward observers called in the wrong coordinates and Hurd empathically annotated “I was not here.”

109 Rouzeau, 186-190, 195; Winter, *Remembering War*, 25-26, 50; Trout, *On the Battlefields of Memory*, 38.

110 Trout, *On the Battlefields of Memory*, 45.

the Vietnam War.<sup>111</sup> Unlike so many of the often studied and yet not representative veterans of the Great War—Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon, and Ernest Hemingway—Hurd was able to use his military service for both personal and professional development, becoming a confident, contributing, professional citizen. Hurd serves as a lens into potentially hundreds, if not thousands, of similar American doughboys. Rather than being lost, Fritz Draper Hurd was found in the trenches.

---

111 Dr. Richard Hurd, email interview, April 18, 2013.