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Alfred Woollacott family papers

Title: Alfred Woollacott family papers
Collection No: MSS.330
Creator: Woollacott family
Extent: 0.25 cubic feet
Inclusive Dates: 1915-1919, 1943-1944

Abstract: The collection contains the letters from Alfred Woollacott (1892-1986) while serving in World War I, and letters from his sons Alfred (1922-1967) and Paul (b. ca. 1926) during their service in World War II. Also contains photographs and ephemera.

Provenance: Purchased from Charles Apfelbaum, April 1991.
Processed by: Michele Fagan, July 1991; Gerald Chaudron, February 2014.
Access: Open to all researchers.
Language: English
Preferred Citation: Alfred Woollacott family papers, Preservation and Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis.

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Biographical information

Alfred Woollacott (1892-1986) of Fitchburg, Massachusetts, served in France with the 103 Field Hospital of the 26th Division during World War I. He became a superintendent of schools and mayor of Fitchburg (1938-1948), sought a seat in Congress in 1942, and was an alternate delegate from Massachusetts to the Republican National Convention in 1944 and 1948. Woollacott had three sons, Alfred, Jr. (1922-1967), Paul (b.ca.1926), and Evan. The two oldest boys served in World War II. Al joined the Army Air Corps and was stationed in England, and won the Distinguished Flying Cross. Paul was in the Navy, at one point on the U.S.S. *Matagorda*.

Scope and contents

The collection includes letters from Alfred Woollacott, 1915-1918, to his fiancée Grace Bray Williams recounting his training, some of his experiences overseas, and his thoughts about the war's outcome. His son Al wrote most of the 1943-1944 letters, describing his training at the Army Technical School in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, his short stay in Brazil with the 34th Bomb Group, and service in England. He mentioned naming the plane "Belle of the Brawl", and the G.I. Bill of Rights, but only alluded to his own experiences. The collection also contains some printed miscellany and photographs.

The letters noted in the inventory are highlighted for their content but not every letter is described.

Related materials

Woollacott Family Papers, 1877-1947, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

Subject terms

Woollacott, Alfred, 1892-1986.
Woollacott, Alfred, 1922-1967.
Woollacott, Paul.
Woollacott family.
World War, 1914-1918--United States.
World War, 1939-1945--United States.

Inventory

Box 1

Folder 1. January 11, 1915 - April 21, 1919. 14 items. Includes:

Two letters, courtship, 1915, 1916.

1917 August 29 - postmarked Fort Devens, Mass. The 6th Massachusetts Infantry is expecting orders to move, perhaps to Westfield, Connecticut. "Today all the officers who are to train the drafted boys are reporting for duty. There's a continual line of them flowing into camp all day longI met a woman who claims the war will be over before next February and that Germany will fall suddenly"

1917 November 18 - 103 Field Hospital, 26 Division. About mail, "We are like a lot of kids on Xmas morning when mail arrivesI suppose the people at home think us wonderful heroes! Many would smile had they seen me in my "blue jeans" digging ditches last week. "

1918 February 24 - France. "Washington's Birthday has been celebrated near here. Wonderful reports of American good work has brought the admiration of all military authoritiesAgain tonight one of the ambulance drivers brought information of twenty-five Germans and one officer actually walking across no man's land and giving themselves up to the Americans. That is a sure proof that the moral of the Army is being broken."

1918 March 15 - "We are preparing to leave so of course evacuating patients is no small "job."...I surely do enjoy these Southerners who has recently come to our company. Some are surely funny with their Negro dialect. If we say anything to them about talking like the Negroes - they say, "We don't talk like niggers. The niggers try to talk like us."

1918 August 28 - He had been "enjoying a performance over in the field given by the Divisional Theatre Company."

1918 September 16 - at a new location, "acting as a divisional evacuating hospital. There patients of all kinds - wounded, sick, etc....Last evening we received some German woundedThese men were from thirty-five to forty-five years old.... I believe I wrote you that we had captured a band & a bicycle train so you can imagine how rapidly we have advanced....Some of the prisoners say the people of Germany are starving and others say different....Germany is making a desperate struggle to win but she cannot."

Folder 2. April 8, 1943 - May 31, 1944. 15 items.

1943 April 8 - Naval training, Sampson, New York. Paul mentions judo classes and artillery practice.

1943 June 16 - AAFTTC, Army Technical School, Sioux Falls, South Dakota. "I thought I had reached the saturation point as far as interest in radio work goes, but honestly last night was the most enjoyableAfter chow we go to code. This is really going to be superb!We had another lecture on insurance today trying to get us to take out insurance."

1944 April 17 - 34th Bomb Group, Brazil. "Bought a souvenir ...a pair of good leather high boots - dressy type It seems to be the favorite souvenir of all the transientsOur destination is a great place. Am anxious to arrive there. "

1944 April 17 - "Yes, we finally named our plane the 'Belle of the Brawl' - do you approve of it?"

1944 April 18 - "After all our waiting around and trying to decide upon a name for our buggy, we decided upon 'Belle of the Brawl'. Now that it is all painted we'll probably think of a thousand better names."

1944 May 14 - England. "There isn't much one can write about here - same daily routine - but I wouldn't swap this job for any in the service."

1944 May 21 - To brother Evan: "A couple English boys paid us a visit today. We are often called upon. Usually all they say is 'Any gum chum? ', but today we got one to talk. He is only 12 yet he is taking Latin, French, Math and Biology for subjectsI hope this mess will be over before you get in the way of the draft board. "

1944 May 26 - England. "As soon as we get back from a good job, we are served coffee or hot chocolate and cake by the Red Cross, and the medics 'serve' us a double shot of whisky. With that under our belt we are all ready to answer questions. "

Folder 3. June 2 - August 9, 1944. 18 items. All V-Mail.

1944 June 18 - England. "I am quite happy with the work, even though it is rough. Have had a couple of lucky breaks - very lucky - but don't worry about what has passed, or what is to come."

1944 June 26 - England. "The new G.I. Bill of Rights seems quite good. Guess Paul ought to fair pretty well. Even I am eligible for refresher courses under the bill. "

1944 June 28 - England. "Have been following the G.O.P. convention news in the "Stars and Stripes." Will be glad to receive dad's report direct. It must be interesting. "

Folder 4. Printed Items, 1910, 1944, undated. 3 items.

Commencement Program, Atlantic Highlands High School, New Jersey, June 9, 1910.

Campaign postcard - Robert Bradford, Lt. Governor, Massachusetts, postmarked 1944 July 8.

Coal not delivered - list of names and addresses.

Folder 5. Printed Items, 1944. 6 items.

Campaign postcard, advertising postcards from printing company.

Postcard - Massachusetts Committee for World Federation.

Alfred Woollacott's delegate's card to Republican National Convention, 1944.

Folder 6. Photographs, circa 1910-1920, 1930s. 22 items.

circa 1910-1920, family gathering in cold weather, picnic on a beach.

circa 1930s, houses backing onto a river or canal. Perhaps tenements. Snow in some shots.