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Phillip N. Pike Papers

1917-1919

1 box (0.5 linear feet)

Call no.: MS 722



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[Scope](#)

[Inventory](#)

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A 21-year-old carpenter, Phillip N. Pike left his home in North Adams, Massachusetts, in August of 1917 to enlist in the Signal Corps. Ordered first to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas for training, and then to France in December of 1917, Pike was assigned to the 78th Aero Squadron of the American Expeditionary Forces, doing construction work on bases where the squadron was stationed. In recognition of his skills, he earned promotion to corporal and then sergeant before the war's end. The squadron served primarily in Romorantin (Loir-et-Cher) and was redesignated the 490th Aero Squadron before demobilizing in late 1918.

The Pike letters are a relatively voluminous and interesting set of soldier's letters from the First World War, written from the perspective of a worker on an air base. Although he was not an aviator, Pike's letters contain many details about life on active duty with the AEF, from the time of his entry into the service in August 1917 through the last days of the war.

Background on Phillip N. Pike

Born in North Adams, Massachusetts to Frank Everett Pike (1958-1910) and Elizabeth Raycroft Pike (1863-1916), Phillip Newman Pike (1895-1953) was 21 when he left home in August of 1917 to enlist in the Signal Corps. He was assigned to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas for training where he and the rest of his company were assembled at Kelly's field into the 78th Aero Squadron. Pike spent two and a half months in Texas before moving back up to New York at the end of October. He spent several weeks in Garden City before being deployed to England in early December as part of the American Expeditionary Forces. From England, the 78th Aero Squadron left for France, where Pike would spend the remainder of the war moving from base to base as he applied his skills in carpentry to building up camps and fortifications wherever the squadron was stationed. Although first employed in construction, Pike was eventually assigned the duties of a military police officer, which he found to be a good fit for him. The squadron served primarily in Romorantin (Loir-et-Cher) and was redesignated the 490th Aero Squadron before demobilizing in late 1918.

In recognition of his skills, Pike was promoted first to corporal in January of 1918, and then to sergeant in April of that year. He returned home to the United States in February of 1919, where he received an honorable discharge. Pike later married Edith P. Lockwood (1899-1990) and had one daughter, Priscilla L. Pike, in 1932.

Scope of collection

The Pike Papers consist primarily of Phillip Pike's letters and postcards home beginning from his enlistment in the U.S. Army in August of 1917, through his deployment to France in December of 1917 and his eventual return home in February of 1919. The collection also includes a photograph of Pike and an unidentified friend in full uniform, Pike's draft and classification notices, his notice of honorable discharge, an informational pamphlet provided by the National War Work Council of the Y.M.C.A., and two letters written by Pike's cousin, Gus Newman, to his sister, Helen J. Kendrick (née Pike).

Pike writes with frankness and humor in his descriptions of military life and events, and offers differing details and perspectives depending on the recipient of his letter. Most of the letters are written to his older brother Harry, his sister Helen, his younger brother Millard (Jack), and his maternal aunts Anna Raycroft and Sarah Gray. The collection also contains one letter to Pike's paternal uncle, Merritt Pike, and family friend A. J. Adams. Through this correspondence, one can glean a detailed picture not only of Pike's experiences as a soldier, but of the daily life and wartime struggles of his family back home.

In the course of his letters, Pike writes on many topics, including military vaccinations, travel and weather, his carpentry work, his military duties, the facilities and amenities at the camps where he is stationed, recreational activities, and the progress of the war. In addition, Pike writes about the news he hears from home and his own thoughts and concerns about his family. To his sister Helen, he writes of his anxieties that Harry will be drafted, leaving their 17-year-old brother Millard and their unmarried aunt Anna alone in North Adams. To his brother Harry, he expresses concern over Helen's marriage to Ray Kendrick, who is already drafted and not guaranteed to return home to her.

One topic in particular that Pike writes to his family about is his correspondence with Hazel Bailey, a 17-year-old girl from Farley, Massachusetts whose family he lodged with before the war. Pike writes of Hazel often, although he is skeptical of the idea of marriage. However, his courtship with her is cut short just prior to the end of the war, when Hazel dies suddenly of pneumonia in September of 1918. In a letter to his brother Millard dated October 10th, 1918, Pike writes "to be expecting a letter from a friend and receive instead a letter from another telling you of your friend's death is a blow not easily parried and I feel her loss very deeply."

The collection also contains some realia in the form of a leather wallet and card case, as well as some 19th and early 20th century American and Canadian pennies.



Phillip N. Pike (seated) and friend, ca. 1919.

Inventory

Correspondence

1917 Aug

Box 1: 1

Correspondence

1917 Sep

Box 1: 2

Correspondence

1917 Oct

Box 1: 3

Correspondence

1917 Nov

Box 1: 4

Correspondence

1917 Dec

Box 1: 5

Correspondence

1918 Jan

Box 1: 6

Correspondence

1918 Feb

Box 1: 7

Correspondence

1918 Mar

Box 1: 8

Correspondence

1918 Apr

Box 1: 9

Correspondence

1918 May

Box 1: 10

Correspondence

1918 Jun

Box 1: 11

Correspondence

1918 Jul

Box 1: 12

Correspondence

1918 Aug

Box 1: 13

Correspondence

1918 Sep

Box 1: 14

Correspondence

1918 Oct

Box 1: 15

Correspondence

1918 Nov

Box 1: 16

Correspondence

1918 Dec

Box 1: 17

Correspondence

1919 Feb

Box 1: 18

Correspondence: Gus Newman to Helen J. Kendrick

1918 Oct-Dec

Box 1: 19

Leather Wallet and Pennies

1875-1919

Box 1
Military Documents
1917-1919
Box 1: 20
Photograph: Pike and friend
ca.1919
Box 1: 21
Souvenir Postcards
1917-1918
Box 1: 22
Y.M.C.A. Pamphlet: "Some Things You Ought to Know About Soldier Life"
1917
Box 1: 23

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Gift of Edward and Libby Klekowski, Nov. 2011.

Processing Information

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English

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Subjects

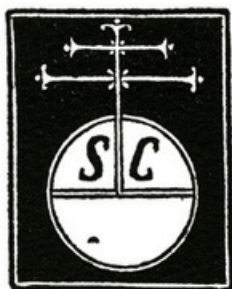
France
North Adams (Mass.)
Romorantin (France)
San Antonio (Tex.)
United States. Army--Military police
World War, 1914-1918
World War, 1914-1918--France
World War, 1914-1918--United States

Contributors

Pike, Phillip N. (Newman), 1895-1953 **[main entry]**
National War Work Council, Y.M.C.A. of the United States.

Genres and formats

Correspondence
Military records
Photographs
Postcards
Realia



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