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TO SAVE THE WORLD: THE UNTOLD STORIES OF MEMORIAL ROW

By

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Professional Paper

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To Save the World: The Untold Stories of Memorial Row

Chairperson: Dennis Swibold

Abstract Content: On Arbor Day, 1919, 32 Ponderosa Pine trees were planted on the campus of the University of Montana to commemorate individuals associated with the university who died while serving Montana in World War I. Collectively called Memorial Row and situated among present-day McGill and Don Anderson Halls and the Social Science and Education buildings, the trees honor individuals who died in combat, as a result of combat injuries, and from the Spanish Influenza pandemic of 1918 while stationed with the Student Army Training Corps (SATC) on the UM campus or at Fort Missoula. Four women who volunteered as nurses and died are also remembered. Contained herein are three stories of individuals memorialized in Memorial Row: James Claude Simpkins, a chemistry graduate of 1916 and second lieutenant in the First Army Air Service; Mrs. Solomon Yoder (a.k.a. Hazel Leonard), a nurse who volunteered at the SATC, contracted the flu and died a few days later; and Paul Logan Dornblaser, a UM football star and 1914 law graduate who served as a corporal in the 6th Marines, and after whom the UM athletic track is named.

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The follow people are just a few of the many who made this project and the start of my journalistic career possible:

My committee, for guiding me through this process and offering their invaluable insight.

Jeff Hull, Megan Regnerus, and Chris Jones, who taught me the skills I needed to know, gave me the opportunities I needed to employ them, and illustrated to me why they matter. I know now that writing is about choices and that real words on real paper can make a difference.

My family, for their unending and unwavering support in all of my endeavors. They saw potential in me long before I saw it in myself.

James E. & Elizabeth Simpkins, Norma Vaughn, Paul Phillips, Don Williams and their families, for their generous sharing of family documents, resources and insights, without which this project would not have been possible. I hope my stories honor their relatives the way the deserve to be honored.

The nearly 675,000 Americans who succumbed to the Spanish Influenza epidemic of 1918 and the 116,516 Americans who died in World War I. Many of their stories remain untold.

PREFACE

The first time I set foot on the University of Montana campus, I walked through Memorial Row in search of the journalism building. I had just been accepted into the graduate program and was curious to see what exactly I'd signed up for. The day was warmer than usual for April, so I took my time strolling through the shade of the row's tall pines. I couldn't help but appreciate a bit of symbolism: I'd begun my schooling 23 years before at Tall Pines Nursery School and would finish here under another tall set of ponderosas. The symmetry seemed appropriate, but I had little idea at the time how much more those trees would soon mean to me.

Later that fall I'd signed up for a feature writing class and began caching story ideas. Passing through Memorial Row had become part of my daily commute to campus, and each day the row's plaques seemed to catch my eye. I knew of Memorial Row's association with World War I, but it took more trips than I'd care to admit before I finally asked myself the obvious question: *how* did these individuals die in World War I? Surely they must be more than a name on a plaque. At one point they were real people with real lives. I thought if I were lucky, one of those lives would be interesting enough to get a short feature out of.

That feature appeared in the March 5, 2009, issue of the *Montana Kaimin* and was the start of this whole project. The day before my deadline, I ran down one last lead in the Archives and Special collections of the Mansfield Library that broke the story open: a file on Paul Dornblaser. After the story ran, I spoke with Betsy Holmquist in the Alumni Office, whom I'd interviewed early in my reporting process. She suggested what a great master's project an authoritative autobiography on Dornblaser would be. *That would make a great project*, I thought, *for someone else*.

Soon the deadline for professional project ideas approached, and I was clueless. I slunk into Dennis Swibold's office to let him know I had nothing. An hour later the conversation took a turn toward my Dornblaser article and Betsy's idea. I had really enjoyed the research, I told him, but didn't want to get bogged down on one subject for an entire year.

"Why not make it three stories," Dennis said. "Pick two other individuals." He also suggested I put it on the Web. I agreed largely because it was the one idea I could stomach, and it was far better than no idea. Encouraged by the relief of having *something*, I began the groundwork of pre-reporting.

A few days later I ran into Peggy Kuhr, dean of the journalism school, and she asked what I was doing for my professional project. When I told her I would be making a Web site on Memorial Row, her brow furrowed in a look of concern and confusion.

"Oh... Have you spoken with Ray Fanning? That sounds very similar to a project he's been working on for the past year or so." For a brief, terrifying moment, I saw my one project idea vanish. I immediately got in touch with Dennis, who calmly put me in touch with Ray. What I'd first thought to be an overlap in ideas turned out to be a great collaboration. My project still had hope. Ray had already designed the Web site and graciously turned over his notes and sources on Memorial Row for me to do the writing. My three stories could seamlessly be integrated into his site. I was ready to go.

This project started as merely an idea and has since exceeded all of my expectations. Walking through Memorial Row now, it's difficult sometimes for me not

to feel like I'm in the 1910s. I've spent so much time there, in books, in letters, in old photographs. The individuals in these stories have haunted me—in a good way. When I look at Memorial Row, I don't see the trees, I see the individuals. I see them as my peers, walking the same campus, facing the same trials. I realize that the drama, stresses and situations we face in life today really are no different than any other time in history. We tend to think our generation is experiencing life for the first time. We're not. That revelation has been reward enough for this project. But it hasn't been the greatest joy.

During this process I had the opportunity to speak and correspond with the relatives of James Claude Simpkins, Hazel Yoder and Paul Dornblaser. They were all very gracious in putting up with my many requests and questions when I felt I was being a pain. I didn't know how much this project meant to them until they told me. Sharing their relatives' stories wasn't a burden, they said. It was a joy. They were all pleased that their ancestors' stories were being remembered. Hearing that in their voices and reading it in their letters has made this project more than an idea or a means to an end. It has exemplified and made me believe the power that words can have.

I hope you enjoy reading these stories as much as I enjoyed writing them.

Michael Webster
Missoula, Montana

"So that when we shall be gone and shall have been forgotten, when the place where we stand shall know us no more, when countless generations of students shall walk upon this campus and look upon these trees, men shall remember and say that these men died to save the world."

Law School Professor Walter L. Pope
Memorial Row Memorial Address
Arbor Day, May 13, 1919

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CHAPTER ONE

The Best Men First: James Claude Simpkins

The corporal triggered the booby-trapped hand grenade, most likely a Model 24 *Stielhandgranate*—German standard issue. Potato mashers, the Brits called them, for they resembled wooden pestles with metal caps. Unlike the small metal pineapples the Brits and French heaved, potato mashers could be flung end over end and were less likely to roll back into the trenches. They were also easy to booby trap.

Pulling a string at the base of the handle triggered an internal friction igniter and a five-second fuse. Pick up a booby-trapped masher, and a weighed ball attached to the string would drop, activating the igniter by gravity—unseen, unheard, silently burning for five seconds. In many cases, the final five.

On the day the corporal found the grenade, September 18, 1918, World War I was in its waning days. American forces had just completed the St. Mihiel drive, their first major offensive on the western front. Fifteen American divisions fought, 216,000 men. The battle was the biggest air operation in history up to that time—1,481 airplanes flew, nearly six times the total number of planes Germany had just four years prior. Following the initial push, the young corporal of the First Army Air Service, Second Pursuit Group, had orders to drive a Lieutenant James Claude Simpkins, the radio officer from Montana, behind the advancing troops in southeastern France.

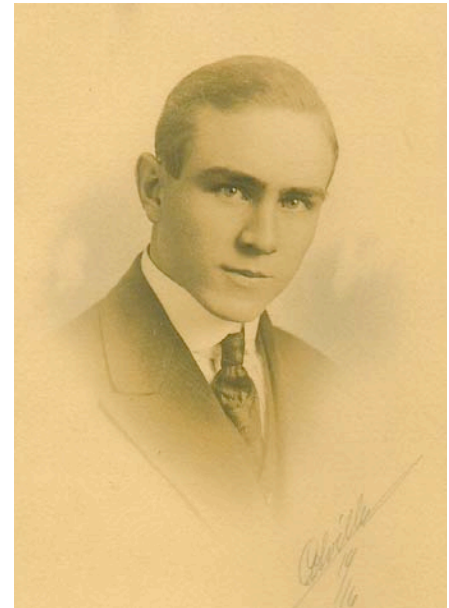
From the car they spotted the grenade. The corporal stopped and got out to pick it up. He held the masher briefly as Simpkins joined him. Seconds ticked away. The corporal's hand was blown off by the explosion, his thigh torn open. Simpkins was

wounded badly in his side. He immediately attempted to fashion a tourniquet for the corporal, but unable to control his own bleeding, bled to death.

The budding scientist, the chemist from Missoula was dead at age 24.

“I am sure the nation has missed him,” his friend Robert Williams would explain years later in his memoir, *Joyful Trek*, “considering his brilliance and his dedication to science. There was a common saying among us that the war was taking the best men first.”

For years the United States had taken an isolationist stance against the war in Europe. But public opinion began to shift after the sinking of the passenger ship *Lusitania* by a German submarine in 1915. One hundred twenty-eight American civilians were killed. On April 6, 1917, Congress voted for war. While Jeannette Rankin—one of Montana’s two congressional representatives and the first women elected to the U.S. Congress—cast an unpopular vote against the war, more than 12,500 Montanans



James Claude Simpkins.
Courtesy James E. & Elizabeth Simpkins

enlisted. Nearly 28,000 additional Montanans were drafted after the government overestimated Montana’s population. The 40,000-plus men now serving comprised 10 percent of Montana’s total population: a percentage higher than any other state. Among them were farmers and lawyers, students and scientists, including the young lieutenant from Missoula who graduated from the University of Montana with a degree in chemistry

in 1916.

James Claude Simpkins was the son of a carpenter, originally from Boulder, Montana. He had keen eyes that shone with intensity, alert and calculating and wise like an owl's. He was shorter than most and always quick to make a friend, winning people over with his smile. "It was his warp and woof," his friend Emerson Stone said, "those who came under its spell could not resist it." But given the trials Simpkins faced in his short life, his smile, the one that "went clear through," was all the more remarkable.

His father, also named James, and his mother, Ella, had four children in just over four years: the oldest, Eleanor (who went by Nell), followed by Edward, James Claude, and Franklin. Whatever struggle the Simpkinses faced to feed four children was soon superseded by the heartbreak of losing one. Franklin, the youngest, died at age nine months.

Adjusting to the loss, Simpkins' father focused on his carpentry and went on to construct many of the prominent buildings in Boulder—the Catholic church, the Jefferson Country Court House, the dance hall (called Simpkins Hall), and numerous residences. He owned the area's largest carpentry shop and lumberyard. The work kept him busy for the following three years before the next child, Martin, was born in 1898. By 1900, ten years after the birth of their first, Ella was expecting her sixth child, a girl.

Pregnant and working outside in the early November twilight, she tripped and badly injured herself. The family immediately sent for the doctor, despite his reputation as a dope addict. He in turn suggested sending for another doctor. James paid \$150 for the train to fetch him, an outrageous sum at the time. While he was en route, Ella delivered her daughter Mabel and died within 24 hours.

About the same time, a woman named May Pender White, who went simply by “Anna,” left her home in the East on a train bound for Boulder, Colorado. At the end of her journey, she departed the train and found herself not in Boulder, Colorado, but in Boulder, Montana. She stayed long enough to meet the recently widowed James Simpkins, and the two married within the year. Yet whatever solace James might have found in a new marriage didn't last long. Shortly after the nuptials, Anna surprised James



Simpkins at Missoula High School, 1909. Courtesy James E. & Elizabeth Simpkins.

when her mother and sister arrived from back east, bringing Anna's son in tow. Another mouth to feed, again followed by heartbreak. By year's end, James' youngest boy, Martin, then two and a half, died. Anna was to blame, Nell would tell a nephew years later. She was convinced her stepmother had poisoned him. He died three days before Simpkins' eighth birthday. The couple divorced in 1903, Anna taking the house in the settlement.

Simpkins' father moved the family to Missoula in 1909 and continued his successful career. He was able to send James Claude and his brother Edward to the University of Montana, and there they flourished. Edward, whirring around campus on his motorbike, found success on the football field. He graduated with an engineering degree. James Claude—“Simp” around campus—had other outlets.

One August, he and Emerson Stone made headlines after spending 11 days traveling several hundred miles around Montana by foot, bike and boat. From Missoula they biked up the Flathead Reservation, boated across Flathead Lake and continued riding to Lake McDonald before exploring and crossing the park on foot. They visited

Browning, Bynum and Choteau before following the Blackfoot home. They slept outside every night but one, worked in exchange for most meals, and laughed to a *Missoulian* reporter on their return about the “expensive wanderings” of eastern tourists in Glacier. They’d spent \$15 apiece, including one night’s hotel fee. One day they reportedly covered 55 miles on foot.



Simpkins ca. 1915. Courtesy James E. & Elizabeth Simpkins

On campus, Simpkins leaned more toward the academic and social. He served on the prom committee his junior year, was a member of the Sigma Nu fraternity, and became the inaugural president of UM’s rifle club. He found a home for his mental energy in the laboratory and pursued graduate work at the University of Missouri. In 1917, he was admitted into Alpha Chi Sigma, the fraternity of chemical professionals. He then took a job with the Chemical Process company near Denver, studying a form of radioactive uranium ore. Equipped with his own lab, Simpkins was poised for a successful career. But when the United States entered the Great War, Simpkins felt his talents could be put to better use. Volunteering his services, he enlisted in the aviation service—a good fit for his leadership, athleticism and intellect—and was assigned to ground school on the campus of the University of Texas in Austin.

Aviation as a tool for warfare was still in its infancy. In April of 1917, the United States had only 65 flying officers, most of whom were tied up in non-flying posts. But war spawns productivity, and by September, when Simpkins reported for duty, ground schools were operational at seven university campuses around the country. They drew young men from all walks of life, including Robert Williams, a young Texan who would

years later write about his service in WWI and a young man he met named Jimmie Simpkins.

Williams came from a large ranching family near Abilene, Texas. The son of a former Baptist minister, he had a square jaw, booming voice and loquacious disposition that belied his caring and often softhearted nature. He'd go on in life to be a journalist, lecturer, political analyst, inventor, and to serve his country again in World War II. But on a warm September day in 1917, he was still a wet-behind-the-ears, 20-year-old farm hand struggling to figure out how the pieces of his newly issued uniform fit together. He sat down on the steps outside his barracks on the University of Texas campus, staring at the yellow canvas puttees in his hand. He knew they went around his shins: above the trousers and laced up the side. But was it the inside of the leg? Maybe the outside. He went to work figuring it out, feeding the laces through eyehole after eyehole up the inside of his shank.

Another man, dressed in the same uniform, sat down beside him. Familiar with the get up, Williams noticed, he began lacing the puttees on the *outside* of his leg. Williams realized he'd gotten it wrong. The man next to him, most likely seeing Williams' error, broke the silence. He snidely commented on what things of beauty these old cavalry-issue puttees were. Both men erupted in laughter. He then gave a winning smile and introduced himself as James Simpkins of Missoula, Montana.

"I immediately liked the fellow," Williams later said of his first encounter with Simpkins. "Though he was carefully analytical with the caution of a true scientist against jumping to conclusions, he was a warm and generous soul, especially thoughtful of a

friend. He had a large head full of horse sense, with large and thoughtful blue-gray eyes that could instantly twinkle, and it became obvious that he had an abundance of energy, mental and physical.”



Squadron 18, Class H. Graduation, 10 November 1917. Simpkins, back row, fourth from left. Williams, front row, first from left. Courtesy James E. & Elizabeth Simpkins.

Williams and Simpkins became inseparable during their month of ground school, graduating together on November 10, 1917. From Texas, they were shipped to Mineola, New York, where an icy fog gripped the air one day as the two lined up on the parade ground. Before them, an officer called for volunteers, those willing to ship for France for pilot training. Simpkins and Williams, their breath hanging in the air before them, volunteered and were among the 100 cadets chosen who would compose the Sixteenth Foreign Detachment. Eight others from their class in Austin were also among the 100, and together they quickly became known within the detachment as the Texan Ten.

From New York to Halifax, where on December 5, 1917, the Texas Ten along with the rest of the Sixteenth Foreign Detachment set sail aboard the British White Star Line *Baltic*, bound for Brest, France. Their trip could have ended there if they had shipped out the next day. On the morning of December 6, 1917, Halifax was nearly obliterated when the *SS Mont-Blanc*, carrying wartime munitions bound for France,

collided with the Norwegian SS *Imo*, caught fire and exploded. Every structure within a 500-acre area was destroyed. Windows were broken up to ten miles away, the blast heard up to 130 miles from the harbor. It triggered a tsunami that came ashore 60 feet above the high water mark. A piece of the *Mont-Blanc*'s anchor shaft, weighing more than half a ton, landed more than two miles away from the explosion.

A short time later, Simpkins and the rest of the detachment made it to France and the foggy village of St. Maixent, where they waited with other detachments that had arrived before them for the coveted spots available at the few French flying schools. Simpkins, the rest of the Texas Ten and the Sixteenth Foreign Detachment had no choice but to bide their time.

Simpkins and the others lived the lives of privates, steady in routine and monotony as they waited for their chance to fly. Working outside in the winter rain and spitting snow, they occupied their time policing the grounds, performing latrine duty, or whitewashing the barracks walls. At chow time, he and the rest of the men ate outside, exposed to the elements. The prefab mess hall had not yet arrived.

Falling into his bunk at lights out, Simpkins could see the shadowy figures of the men around him: a few entertainers by profession, an architect, several engineers, musicians. They talked and sang and bonded. Cadet Gettinger might silence the chatter with a magnificent, effortless rendition of Ave Maria. Cadet Tinnerholm's violin would bring to life the classics. Another cadet from New York might erupt in a triumphant parody of an aria, the rhyme and meter often bawdy and ribald. Williams reveled in the education of it all. Occasionally he'd contribute a few lines of Kipling in his Texan

twang. One night he ran his mouth and brought his entire barracks to laughter.

“Williams,” another cadet said, “you talk so much you have to say something funny once in a while.”

As the chatter and laughter subsided, taps would eventually play. Lying in the dark and silence, Simpkins, Williams, and the rest of the men would prepare for another day, another week, another month of waiting.

Occasionally Simpkins would explore the nearby villages. He spoke French but quickly found that his pronunciation betrayed his book learning of the language. Yet he had the opportunity to practice when he and other cadets were invited into the French homes for tea parties and socials. Most of the French men were also away fighting, leaving the wives and daughters at home to host the Americans. The men enjoyed the women’s company, and Simpkins was always at ease with his natural social graces and trademark smile. Yet in his friend Williams’ eyes, he always held something back, never getting too involved, though one woman in particular wanted to marry him. He had the opportunity but not the will. His heart belonged back in Montana to a woman with whom he was engaged.



Simpkins in France with Mme. Brard's Daughter. Courtesy Donald Williams.

Simpkins received a few letters from her while in France, and they troubled him deeply. Twice after reading a letter from her, he confided in his friend Williams that he wasn’t going to make it home. The comments disturbed Williams, who could only speculate as to why Simpkins felt this way. Such pessimism was rare for Simpkins.

Word around the barracks was that the flying schools were losing more men each day as they crashed their hastily made airplanes, so Simpkins certainly had reason to believe he might be one of them soon. Perhaps it was just the maturity that came with Simpkins being four years older, Williams thought. He put the dreary images out of his head, and convinced himself that Simpkins' girl would be motivation enough for him to make it home alive.

Four months passed at St. Maixent while Simpkins and the rest of the detachment waited for their shot at flight school. They began to talk more and more about flying. As the wait continued, morale dropped.

Williams described the waiting as almost being to the point of desperation. "Picture several hundred ambitious young men, overcharged with energy and eagerness to get into the action," he said, "consigned month after month after month to the colorless, futile routines of camp life. [We] *had* to get into the action."

The Allied air forces were gaining strength. Only a year before had been the "Bloody April" of 1917, where British aircrews had suffered 50 percent casualties in only one month. During that time, a pilot's life expectancy was only 11 days. Now the Allies had regained air superiority, producing new planes twice as fast as the Germans. And Manfred von Richthofen, the infamous "Red Baron," destroyer of 80 Allied aircraft, had just been shot down and killed. The end of the war was coming, and the Americans, Simpkins and William included, were ready to fight—before it was too late.

A man in their detachment, Cadet Fiery, wrote a letter to his older sister explaining their situation and asked that she pass it along to her husband, Newton D.

Baker, who conveniently held the post of Secretary of War.

By the end of their fifth month in France, Simpkins and the rest of the men got an indirect reply. Through the ranks, the call came down to try to persuade the men to volunteer for other services. Simpkins and Williams, unable to wait any longer, volunteered for radio service.

In northeastern France, Simpkins attended the intelligence school in Langres, where he and Williams learned about the radio equipment of the day, in addition to the basics of radio repair and installation, and became more proficient in Morse code. When the course was finished, he and Williams were commissioned second lieutenants and assigned to the air training field at Tours, France, where they installed what Williams called “intercommunication sets” in the observer’s cockpits of the two-seater planes. Pilots took them up to test the equipment in-flight, where Simpkins and Williams continued conversations, plane to plane, above the noise from the engine’s din and whistling wind. They’d check in with the ground radio and return to Earth, the closest they would ever get to flying.

By mid-August they had finished their service at Tours and were sent to the First Army Air Service as radio officers. Simpkins was assigned to the Second Pursuit Group, Williams the First Day Bombardment Group.

In the early morning darkness of September 12, Robert Williams awakened to the sound and force of an explosion that from a dozen miles away rattled his cot, almost dumping him on the floor. In preparation for the St. Mihiel drive, an effort to retake German occupied land surrounding the stronghold town of Metz, French and American troops

were launching artillery shells over the front to clear a way for the upcoming charge. The ground continually shook under Williams, who found the dawn's light that morning dampened by a storm whose high winds and low clouds were as frenetic as the squadrons around him. Amid the ringing telephones and constantly updated wall maps, orders went out to send up the bombers of the squadron, American-built DH-4s. The two-seater planes were called "flaming coffins" for they so often burned upon crashing, which was often enough even in good weather. Williams found it criminal to send novice flyers up in such conditions, but wasn't in a position—or the place—to do anything about it. By noon, he was ordered to the First Pursuit Group to help with their radio station.

With the added number of American troops, the Allies easily broke through the



Simpkins in France. Robert Williams wrote under this photo in his photo "Innocent Jimmie." Courtesy Donald Williams.

line and retook the salient. The attack ended quickly, and things became less chaotic. The battle was the first victory of the war by an independent American army. But in the mess one night at headquarters after the initial push, Williams' world became much more turbulent. A captain entered and told him that the radio officer in the Second Pursuit Group, traveling behind the troops with the danger seemingly passed, had been killed along with his driver, a corporal. Sickened, Williams left the mess immediately and headed toward the office to verify the report. His worst fears were confirmed. The man he'd loved like

brother, his alter ego, was dead. Innocent Jimmie Simpkins was dead.

Thousands of miles away, another group of men were breaking ground on the University of Montana campus in Missoula. Earlier that spring, the War Department had developed the Student Army Training Corps at 157 college campuses across the country, and the ground being broken in Missoula was the site for two SATC barracks. A successful carpenter in town was in charge of the construction, a man who, before moving to Missoula nine years prior with his four children, had constructed several other large buildings in Boulder, Montana. What he didn't know as construction began was that the dormitory he was building would later bear his son's name and by extension his own: Simpkins Hall.

When James Claude Simpkins was killed in action on September 18, 1918, he was the first graduate of the University of Montana to die in World War I. A month and a half later, UM President E.O. Sisson wrote to Chancellor E.C. Elliot of "what seems a very interesting and worthy suggestion" from Professor Farmer: "that the first unit be named after Lieutenant Claude Simpkins." Chancellor Elliot, President Sisson and the local executive board of the university met a short time later and decided that one of the barracks would officially be named in Simpkins' honor.

A short time after Simpkins's death, his father received a letter from his son's commanding officer, dated September 27, 1918. Lieutenant Colonel Davenport Johnson of the Second Pursuit Group, First Pursuit Wing, told James that "Lieutenant James C Simpkins has been in my command since September, 1918. During that time . . . I had every opportunity of observing his work closely. I found him, as everyone who came in contact with him, extremely capable and authoritatively versed in radio work. Loyal and

courteous as an officer and highly respected by everyone . . .”

Years later, in his mid-80s, Simpkins’ friend Robert Williams still frowned at the death. “There’s got to be some way to prevent wars,” he’d write. “Running away from a hardened, expansionist enemy, softening our defenses, would invite destruction. But it is criminal to keep on killing off the finest young men in all countries.”

Lieutenant James Claude Simpkins, 24, scientist, soldier, Montanan, was laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery.

CHAPTER TWO

“Safe at the Campus”: Mrs. S.A. (Hazel) Yoder

Appendicitis

Hazel Leonard awoke one day in early 1910 and found herself in a strange bed in a room not her own. She was young, just 20 years old, one of six in a large family of adopted cousins and a younger sister. Back home in the small coal mining town of Monarch, Wyoming, she played piano at the Methodist church and served in social clubs and benefit societies. She attended plays when they came to town, a break from the work at the company store. Her widowed mother allowed her to travel, to visit family, to see friends; a few days before she had spent New Year’s with friends in Montana.

She awoke bedridden on January 5 and found an incision healing on her right side, a mark of the surgery she’d just undergone to remove her appendix at the state hospital in Sheridan, Wyoming. She spent three long weeks convalescing there in the strange bed, in the room not her own, surrounded by patients and doctors and nurses.

“While very glad to be at home,” the *Sheridan Post* reported soon after, “she speaks very kindly of the treatment and courtesy received in the state institution.” Hazel didn’t stay home for long in Monarch, a three-street town tucked along the Tongue River. She left the church, the store, the societies—left them in the shadow of the coal-rich hills and returned to the state hospital a year later to begin training as a nurse.

By 1914, her training completed, Hazel was a nurse in Great Falls, Montana, respected by her peers and colleagues. She lived with her mother and sister; three of her cousins followed from Monarch a year later. Also making the trip north was an accountant from Monarch, a young man named Solomon Yoder. He had captained the

Monarch baseball team and served in the Elk's Club. He had attended plays when they came to town. He was well traveled, visiting family, seeing friends. In Montana he took a job near Great Falls as a credit manager with the Conrad Mercantile Company in Conrad. He and Hazel began courting. In 1915, they married. A small affair at the Leonard home, Hazel exchanged her vows one Saturday afternoon in a tailored suit of golden brown, with her mother, sister, and two cousins at her side. Hazel—now Mrs. S.A. Yoder—25 years old, put her nursing career aside for a turn at married life.

The Yoders moved again, this time to Red Lodge, Montana, where Sol took a job with the Northwestern Improvement Company, first as a clerk and later an accountant. By all accounts, their lives were uneventful. Then 1918, the message. Mrs. Yoder was contacted by the chairman of the state board of nurse examiners, who badly needed nurses in Missoula—an epidemic, a dire situation. The city needed any help it could get. Mrs. Yoder packed her bags and immediately left.

A New Enemy

The first symptoms appeared sometime on Sunday, October 6, 1918. A tickle in the throat, a chill, a dull ache in the joints. The citizens of Missoula were largely unaware, distracted by the great war abroad and their weekly routines. Many of the town's 12,000 residents were enjoying their day of rest, walking the streets of town and enjoying the warm autumn day. Churchgoers who were finished with their morning services took their weekly stroll, ambling along the sidewalks as streetcars clamored by. Newsboys cried out from street corners, hocking the morning's paper.

The paper's bold headline that day signaled a shift in the European fighting:

“Huns Ready to Accept Wilson’s Peace Terms,” it proclaimed. The country had officially been at war since April of the prior year, and peace was now close. It would have been easy to miss—and much easier to ignore—another front-page story that day, tucked neatly beneath the fold on the bottom half of the page. Aside from the Huns abroad, the town was about to face a new enemy at home.

“Spanish influenza increased more rapidly during the 24 hours ending today noon than in any similar period since the disease became epidemic,” the article began. More than 17,000 new cases at Army camps nationwide had been reported to the surgeon general for the past 24 hours. Army camps, like the one at nearby Fort Missoula, where soldiers lived elbow to elbow, were the hardest hit. The disease was making its way west from the East Coast cities; Montana’s first case had appeared just a few weeks prior. A tickle, a cough, a dull ache. An invasion was beginning.

Forty-eight hours later, October 8, the Missoula city council met to “make plans to combat the influenza,” the *Missoulian* newspaper reported. Twenty-five cases of influenza had been confirmed at Fort Missoula. A quarantine was imposed, nothing more than a mere precaution.

Sixteen new cases appeared in the city the next day.

The council met again and leapt into action, giving City Health Officer Dr. J.P. Richey free rein. At his directive, all places of public assemblage were closed: churches, schools, and especially theaters, which were seen as particularly virulent. Just the night before in New York, the National Motion Picture Association decided that no new motion pictures were to be released anywhere in the country for at least a week.

The *Missoulian* newspaper called the council's restrictions a lid clamped over the epidemic, but soon they saw it wasn't clamped tight enough.

Ninety new cases appeared over the next two days.

Pool halls and saloons remained open so long as people didn't linger. They did anyway, even after Police Chief Moore and his men hauled hundreds of chairs, benches and stools from the saloons and stacked them in storerooms. The patrons stood and drank. The infection rates appeared constant and no one had yet died. Headlines grasped at optimism: "'Flu' Situation Not Dangerous," "Missoula Is Winning The Influenza Battle." One doctor, identified only as "a prominent Missoula physician," said, "the scare is out of all proportion to the present danger."

Twenty-four more cases were reported.

The virus was gaining ground, but the new war at home still played a distant and insidious second to the war overseas. However loosely clamped the lid might have been, it flew open when word of a German surrender hit town.

Bells tolled and sirens sounded as news of President Wilson's peace offer trickled into Missoula on October 11. A German reply, intercepted from wireless towers in France, declared that Germany was ready to accept Wilson's offer. France relayed the message as an official dispatch. "Germany Yields All; Ready To Evacuate" the *Missoulian* ran the next morning. Word spread through town. Such a din arose that concerned citizens flooded the phone lines calling each other, trying to hear the news. The switchboard literally lit up. Fuses blew around the operators as they scrambled to connect and transfer calls. Additional help had to be brought in; one operator was given the sole task of

replacing fuses until the rush subsided.

The fire chief turned out the company vehicle, touring the business section of town, starting an impromptu parade. Under the “great flagpole” at Higgins and Front, the city band and mercantile drum corps assembled, playing patriotic songs. Prominent citizens paraded a dozen times up and down Higgins Street from the bridge to Northern Pacific depot. Cars with red, white and blue and bunting poured into the street, their horns constant. More and more people spilled into downtown from the outlying areas and joined in the celebration, blocking the streetcars and disrupting their schedule, much to the chagrin of Police Chief Moore. The citizens of Missoula moved inside as the evening wore on, assembling in hotel lobbies, elbow to elbow, to talk about the news and situation.

The war abroad seemed all but over; a war at home found the foothold it needed, advancing one sneeze, one handshake, one kiss at a time.

Causalities were inevitable.

“Safe at the Campus”

Mrs. Yoder arrived on October 19, 1918, to find the town a shadow of what it had been just a week before. The Lid remained clamped, and still the number of flu cases had risen. Five thousand cases had been confirmed in Montana. The first death in Missoula occurred on the 12th when George Bonewitz, one of the soldiers in training at Fort Missoula, passed away that morning.

The next day, 109 cases had been reported at the fort alone.

Doctors across the city reported new cases to Health Officer Richey, who could

barely keep up recording them in his log of communicable diseases. The first cases of October 8 are clearly labeled in fine script—“Epidemic Influenza”—but soon the pages were pocked with ditto marks. By October 17, those marks were replaced with single pen strokes, one line running down the entire page. The cases were simply tallied at the end of each day.

“Total case for day: 63... 60 + 54 SATC... 69... 70.”

The newspapers finally acknowledged the situation: “‘Flu’ Epidemic Increases Here” the *Missoulian* reported. The *Sentinel* was more sensational: “Epidemic Rages: Menace Growing.”

Classes at the university had also been canceled as a preventative measure a week before. As Mrs. Yoder arrived on campus, no sounds of student life reverberated among the buildings or spilled from the oval. The only activity was the training of 150 or so men who enrolled at the university as part of the Student Army Training Corps. Permanent barracks had been under construction since the middle of September, but the men continued sleeping in light tents. The weather turned cooler, and the tents proved inadequate for the wintry gusts sweeping through Hellgate Canyon and the Clark Fork River. On at least one occasion, the tents aligned at the base of Mt. Sentinel were knocked flat. Adding to the misery, the men’s uniforms were lightweight summer issue. Training for trench warfare—digging trenches and charging out of them in the fields where buildings now stand—the men were forced to work without gloves or overcoats. None had been issued.

The men crowded into the bleachers of the football stadium when the epidemic hit, receiving their lecture from a professor at a blackboard positioned on the sidelines.

By the 15th, all classes were cancelled, freeing up their days for more war training. Still, they were the butt of gibes and jokes: men in the SATC were said to be “Safe At The Campus.” Instead of shipping overseas, they got to “Stick Around Till Christmas.”

The flu hit. Secondary infections set in. The first case of Scarlett Fever appeared on the 20th. With no hospital facilities on campus, a few of the eight men were quarantined in a small room of an infirmary; the others in a one-room music building. Seven more cases were reported, and the men were moved to the gymnasium. Mrs. Yoder jumped right into the work and, in the words of University President E.O. Sisson, “immediately showed herself an invaluable helper.” A handful of female students, without the demand of coursework, also volunteered to help as nurses.

Five more men fell ill.

Lacking a hospital facility on campus, and with spare room filling up with sick men, President Sisson appealed to the district military inspector of the SATC in Helena. “It became clear at the beginning of this week,” he began, “that we must have a separate hospital building at the earliest possible moment. In fact the reopening of University work now hinges absolutely on the completion of this hospital and the moving of all seriously contagious patients into it.” The foundation was laid and construction began on the October 24. Until then, Mrs. Yoder and the other medical personnel made do as best they could. By then it was too late.

“I Had a Little Bird/Its Name Was Enza./I Opened Up the Window/And in Flew Enza.”

The influenza virus attacks the respiratory tract in humans, where it finds the environment necessary to reproduce. As the virus multiplies, healthy cells are destroyed.

The body responds, causing inflammation in the infected tissues, and anywhere along the respiratory system can be affected, from the nose down to the lungs themselves. Fever, chills, coughs and muscle aches are all classic symptoms. The process, from infection to illness, can take as little as one to two days.

The virus is only the first swing of a one-two punch. With the mucus membranes damaged and inflamed, the tissue is prone to secondary infections. Usually these are bacterial, and often they are lethal. Strep throat and *Staphylococcus* infections are common; pneumonia and heart trouble often follow.

The Spanish Influenza of 1918 was a particularly adept killer, its key advantage being speed. Individuals diagnosed in the morning could be dead the same night. So severely did the virus attack, infected lung tissue could swell and hemorrhage. Some victims literally drowned in their own blood and fluids. Among the hardest hit were individuals in their 20s and 30s who were otherwise perfectly healthy, a demographic usually at low risk with other strains of influenza. Not surprisingly, military camps and hospitals, with scores of 20- and 30-somethings in close contact, often had the highest infection rates.

The virus, like other flu viruses, was also airborne, surviving in the air until coming in contact with a host. Sneezes, coughs, hearty laughs: all could spread the virus. Secondary contact also spread the disease as the virus hopped from surface to surface: snot from an infected nose, to a doorknob, to another individual's clean hand. Then a touched face, another case. As the pandemic ran in course, 28 percent of the U.S. population was infected. Approximately 675,000 Americans died, nearly six times the number of U.S. soldiers who died in WWI.

In the third week of October 1918, things got only worse in Missoula. As Mrs. Yoder attended to the men who'd fallen ill on campus, 70 new cases were reported on the 23rd, bringing the total number of cases in Missoula to 689. The city council redoubled its efforts to tighten The Lid. The already sparse streets of downtown soon resembled a ghost town as the last businesses were closed. The district court cleared its docket. The saloons and pool halls were finally closed. Bartenders were seen strolling Higgins Avenue in an aimless fashion, loitering on the corner in idle discussion of the situation. Confectionaries were prohibited from selling ice cream and soft drinks. Steam rose inside barbershops as towels were boiled after each customer, as mandated by the city. Clerks, messengers and postal workers were also all required to wear masks, though not all did so. The public, at first willing to wear them, soon tired of the hassle. "Antiseptic substitutes, onions, salt tobacco and eucalyptus oil" were often the preferred prophylactic measures, the *Sentinel* reported.

The town hit its nadir on Sunday, October 27, a day the *Missoulian* reported as "dismal" and "perhaps the gloomiest and quietest day that Missoula has ever known." Low fog blanketed the town in a gray mist that later gave way to rain. Higgins Avenue was deserted, save a few parked cars, and one could almost hear the golden autumn leaves falling to the ground. Sunday sermons were printed in the newspaper so people could worship at home, where they remained sequestered. They hoped the colder weather would kill the airborne germs.

"Break into the jail if you don't want to break out with the 'flu,'" one inmate of the county jail told a *Missoulian* reporter. Joking aside, the jail was considered to be the

safest place from the epidemic. The inmates had little interaction with the outside world and routinely disinfected the cells. The *Missoulian* article hastened to add, “It is not openly advised that law abiding citizens offend the law to gain the immunity from the dread disease in the county jail...”

The day could be considered dismal for another reason. The previous afternoon, City Health Officer Richey, recording the new flu cases the day, opened his log and entered case number 849: Mrs. S.A. Yoder, Red Lodge, Montana.

Again Mrs. Yoder found herself in a strange hospital, in a bed not her own. She’d been taken from her own room on campus to the Northern Pacific Railroad Hospital on the north side of town shortly after falling ill, where President Sission later said “more complete and constant care could be provided.” By the 30th, just four days after Mrs. Yoder was diagnosed, hospitals were at capacity, caring for 70 influenza cases alone. Fever gripped Mrs. Yoder, and the physician overseeing her care reported there had been some lung involvement. Her mother and sister joined her at her bedside, making the trip from Seattle, where they’d been living part time. Her husband, Sol, came from Red Lodge, leaving behind his work. Within a few days, Mrs. Yoder was showing improvement. She stayed at the Northern Pacific hospital, convalescing for the next week, the first week of November. The worst had seemingly passed. Sol returned to Red Lodge and the work he’d put on hold. He barely had time to settle back in when he received word to return to Missoula. His wife had taken a turn for the worst: a complication, heart trouble. He returned on the 9th and learned he’d arrived just hours late. Mrs. Yoder had passed away at three p.m. on the prior afternoon, Friday, November

8, 1918. Her mother and sister had been at her side.

On Sunday, Mrs. Yoder, 29, was buried in Red Lodge cemetery. News of her death was overshadowed by the historic headlines of the next day, November 11, 1918. The armistice was signed; the war abroad was over.

Five months later, on April 3, 1919, Missoula City Health Officer Richey opened his log and marked the end of the war at home. He recorded his one reported case of the day, epidemic influenza, case number 2,566, the last in Missoula.

CHAPTER THREE

Over the Top: Paul Logan Dornblaser

Under heavy shell fire, Paul Logan Dornblaser crouched in the shallow trench on a hillside in western France and scribbled in his diary.

Oct. 6th Sunday... Our losses were heavy this morning.

The year was 1918, and Dornblaser and the rest of the 2nd marine division were advancing far into German territory on Blanc Mont Ridge.

The machine gun ahead opened up and gave us hell.

The wooded, hilly terrain made progress slow as they crept toward the top, intent on driving back the German line and seizing a strategic railroad line on the other side.

Sgt. Kelly was placing his gun when he fell backwards killed.

This sector, Dornblaser wrote, is *no bon*—no good.

I see three comrades dead within 50 feet of me... A boy on my left has just relieved himself and was hit with two machine guns through his trousers. They can see us better than we can see them. We are now standing by. ...Some Hell!

Dornblaser, a corporal, had been assigned to a machine gun battalion, a group that required strong men to haul the guns and ammunition through the woods of France. It suited him perfectly. When he wasn't crouched into a trench, Dornblaser stood five foot eight and weighed nearly 200 pounds. He brought the same energy and intensity to war that he had to the football field as a star halfback and tackle on the University of Montana team five years prior. There his size was formidable, yet he ran fast and tackled low, with the force and profile of a warship at full steam ahead. The analogy spurred a

moniker, and Dornblaser, the “Battleship,” captained the team his junior and senior year.

“It is safe to say that of all the men who ever played football in the Montana uniforms, none will stand more prominent in aftertime than Paul Dornblaser,” the *Kaimin* student newspaper proclaimed at the end of his senior-year season. With mortar shells exploding around him, pinned down by German fire, writing in his diary, Dornblaser carried a memento from that last season at Montana, a reminder of his time in Missoula. He carried it from trench to muddy trench: a golden watch fob, shaped like a football, no larger than a jellybean. “Paul Dornblaser, Left Tackle” the inscription read on one side. “Montana Champions, 1913,” on the other.

“His example is bound to live,” the student paper went on to say, “and it will better athletics at Montana.”

On a Wednesday in December 1913, students of the University of Montana packed the campus assembly hall for weekly convocation. More crowded than usual, the buzz of anticipation centered on the main event of the day’s meeting: players from the football team were being honored for their championship season. After two songs from the women’s glee club and a speech from the president of the Missoula Chamber of Commerce Sid Coffee, each man was called forward to receive his prize: a golden football watch fob.

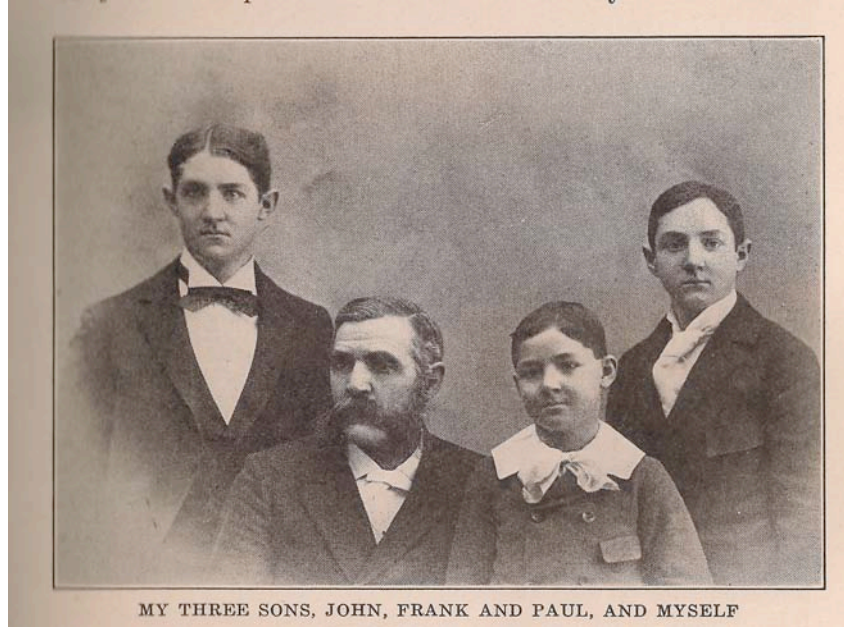
The second man to step forward was Paul Dornblaser, so well known throughout the campus that one nickname was hardly enough: Dorn, The Baron, Blitz, The Big Bruin, Battleship. In addition to football, he had played for the baseball team and track squad and captained the annual freshman versus sophomore class tug of war; he’d been a

member of the glee club, the Y.M.C.A. and the Hawthorne Literary Society.

Dornblaser's German heritage and large size gave him a hard but rounded shape, like a pumpkin on a rain barrel, but standing before his cheering classmates, he couldn't help but smile. His friendly countenance won many hearts. More than just athletic, Dornblaser, president of the associated student body and member of the Sigma Chi fraternity, was hinted to be a ladies' man. The crowd cheered, and the B-average senior law student was pressed to say a few words. He told them football is a combination of work and fun, but mostly work. That year, his skills helped his team beat the cross-state rivals from Bozeman, thumping the Aggies twice to take the state championship. Their first match in Bozeman, a 7-0 win for the Grizzlies, was considered by many at the time to be the best football game ever played in Montana. The assembly signaled the end of Dornblaser's achievements on the field and marked his place in Montana football history. Thrust into his hand was the fob, a black ribbon attached. Dornblaser found his way back to his seat to the sound of thundering applause.

Born in 1887 in Topeka, Kansas, Dornblaser was the youngest of five children, following two girls and two boys. His father was a Lutheran preacher and Civil War veteran who had been wounded several times serving in the Seventh Pennsylvania Cavalry. After the war, his father had attended seminary and become a traveling home missionary, spending 14 years in Kansas, mostly Topeka, before moving to Ohio, Illinois, and ultimately Chicago, the family in tow.

When Dornblaser was 11, he saw his two older brothers leave home to fight in the Spanish-American War. The tradition of soldiering had been well established in the



Paul Dornblaser, second from right. From My Life Story for Young and Old, by T.F. Dornblaser, 1930. Used with permission.

Dornblaser family by this point. Dornblaser’s great uncle, Captain Israel B. Schaeffer, had commanded Dornblaser’s father in the cavalry; another great uncle, Benjamin Dornblaser, served as a major general in the Civil War; John Dornblaser, Paul’s great-grandfather, was a captain in the War of 1812.

When his oldest brother, John, returned from the Spanish-American War, he was a physical wreck. “When his mother saw him enter the door a mere shadow of his former self,” his father, Thomas Franklin Dornblaser, later wrote, “she cried as if her heart would break.” Suffering from rheumatism and dependent on a crutch and later a personal assistant, he managed to earn a law degree from the University of Michigan and become a city attorney before dying a few years later. The middle brother, Thomas Franklin Jr.—Frankie—returned unharmed and became a physician. He would later write how he and the veterans of that war prided themselves as being the first overseas veterans. Their military service and advanced educations continued a family precedent. Dornblaser soon followed.

By high school, he had shown his athletic prowess on Chicago's North Division High School football team. The team had achieved such acclaim that in 1906 they were slated to play for the title of National High School Football Champions against Seattle's



Dornblaser at Chicago's North Division High School, 1905. SDN-004025, Chicago Daily News negatives collection, Chicago History Museum.

Broadway High School. Dornblaser and the team arrived in Seattle a few days before New Year's, saw the city, and prepared for battle. At 3 p.m. on game day, the opening kickoff sailed through the cold January air into Dornblaser's arms, and the National Championship was underway. The field, the Seattle High School yearbook of 1907 claimed, was "as sticky as a glue pot" from a snow and thaw the day prior. Dornblaser, "the star of the Middle West," the only Chicago player mentioned by name in the yearbook, slogged along with his teammates but ultimately came up short, losing to Seattle 11-5.

The trip to Seattle likely had another effect on Dornblaser, as it almost certainly took him through Montana. It's possible that he stopped in Missoula to see a relative on his mother's side of the family, a Mrs. J. Wilson Moore, formally Kate Harpster, who had moved to Missoula as early as 1890. Having seen Montana and knowing that a relative lived there are factors that likely helped Dornblaser decide to move to Montana after graduating from high school in 1907, although his exact reasons remain a mystery to



Player's from Chicago's North Division High School, 1905. Dornblaser, third from the right. SDN-004019, Chicago Daily News negatives collection, Chicago History Museum.

family descendants and researchers today. From the time he moved from Chicago until 1910, when Dornblaser was living with his aunt and enrolled at the University of Montana, records are scarce. Second-hand reports from the school newspaper and a university yearbook indicate

that Dornblaser lived in Clemons, Montana, a town that doesn't exist on today's maps of Montana. (A 1930 map shows Clemons, population 25, on the Rocky Mountain front, a few miles south of Augusta.) Another article in the student paper says he worked at a sheep ranch in eastern Montana. Letters and family oral history point toward time spent on the Deschamp family ranch just west of Missoula. But by 1910, city life. In addition to the university, Dornblaser began attending the First Presbyterian Church. The pastor there was the Rev. John Maclean, whose son Norman would later write of early twentieth-century life in Missoula through his iconic novella, *A River Runs Through It*.

"I know your son Paul very well," Rev. Maclean wrote to Dornblaser's mother in 1912, "and like every body else who knows him here I respect him highly... He is 'straight goods.'" Maclean also wrote that he tried to get Dornblaser to teach Sunday school or lead a troop of Boy Scouts, "a work for which he is admirably fitted." Dornblaser's excuse was that he wouldn't be able to do them justice with his time split between studies and football. "He has the work of two ordinary men on his shoulders,"

Maclean wrote. “Assuring you that Paul has the highest respect of everyone who knows him,” Maclean concluded, “and that I count him among my friends.”

Finishing his bachelor of law degree in 1914, Dornblaser missed graduation, as did all nine of the law graduates of the first law class at Montana. He was in Helena taking the bar exam. “I’m quite confident and am anticipating a favorable reply,” he wrote to siblings. He was as an assistant county attorney for Missoula by 1915 when his actions in a rather insignificant case brought some attention.

One Saturday night, Dornblaser’s client, M.R. Bride, found himself facing a bar tab after a night of “drinking considerably,” the *Missoula Sentinel* newspaper reported. Bride presented the bartender a check that had been endorsed earlier in the night by a friend of his. He was promptly arrested and charged with trying to pass a bad check. Hearing Bride’s side of the story, Dornblaser didn’t believe him to be a crook and granted an opportunity to right the situation. Under the threat of serving jail time himself should anything go wrong, Dornblaser secured Bride’s release, provided carfare, and let him “ride out to see a friend who had promised to make the check good.” Bride returned a short time later with the funds, and the charges were dropped.

With two more years of practicing law, Dornblaser had established himself by 1917 as a successful attorney and won the friendship of many prominent Montanans, from the local Elk’s Club and lawyers to senators and congressmen. He was elected as a trustee of the First Presbyterian Church and as vice president of the University of Montana Alumni Association. He hunted in the fall and was by all indications content with his life in Missoula.

On April 6, Congress voted for war. By June the post office of Missoula housed a Marine recruiting station in the basement, and Dornblaser and a few other Missoula men expressed their intent to enlist. The *Missoula Sentinel* newspaper ran the story, asserting that “The marine corps is a more difficult branch of the service to enter than other departments, it is understood, because of the rigid examination that is given. Only men of the highest physical type are permitted to enter.”



Paul Dornblaser (left) with (left to right) Mrs. Kate Harpster Moore, Ike Harpster and Josephine Dornblaser. Courtesy Paul D. Phillips.

Dornblaser’s father, despite his own war experience and the family history, urged him to wait, hoping that perhaps the war would end and he wouldn’t be needed. To his father’s chagrin, Dornblaser followed instead in the footsteps his brothers and father had walked before him. “Now I can go with my comrades,” Dornblaser replied. “If I wait they may send me where they please.”

With his law degree, age and experience, Dornblaser almost certainly could have earned a commission. His sisters later wrote that “he was offered a safe position with good pay in the Ordinance Department, but felt he should enlist as a private.” He did so on June 20, 1917.

After reportedly scoring perfect marks on his entry exam, Dornblaser and Jack Powers, another Missoula enlistee, boarded the Milwaukee Olympian railcar for Portland

for the second stage of exams. From there they continued on to Mare Island, a naval shipbuilding yard and marine barracks near San Francisco in present day Vallejo, California. Recognizing Dornblaser's leadership merit, the brass asked him to stay as an instructor. He declined. "When I know I am able to lead the destiny of men, then I would try for a commission but not until," he wrote to Mrs. Moore, whom he called his aunt. "Even if I had their confidence I would know if I made a mistake and was the cause of them losing their lives."

"I read that from Paul's letter to the marine that recruited him," Mrs. Moore later wrote to Paul's brother and sister-in-law. "He fairly jumped from his chair and exclaimed, 'Oh, for an Army like Dornblaser.'"

By October 1917, Dornblaser and the rest of the 109th company sailed from Mare Island through the Panama Canal en route to Quantico, Virginia, to join the 8th Marine Regiment. Yet Dornblaser's path to France took a literal U-turn with the 8th regiment was sent to Fort Crockett in Galveston, Texas, in November. The Allied forces were largely dependent on the Mexican oil fields at Tampico, and U.S.-Mexican relations were less than stellar after the U.S. military had seized the port city of Vera Cruz in 1914. In 1916, Major General John J. "Black Jack" Pershing led an expedition to quell the forces of the revolutionary Pancho Villa, further chilling the relationship. The 8th regiment, now stationed at Fort Crockett, would finishing their training and, if necessary, invade Mexico to secure the oil fields.

No such event took place, and in the six months Dornblaser was stationed there, he and his company instead spent much of the time selling Liberty Bonds and War Stamps. Outselling the other companies in the regiment, they were rewarded by standing

for inspections less often than the others. The company had another skill besides selling: shooting. Composed of 100 men, the company was divided into 46 experts, 34 sharpshooters and 20 marksmen, of which Dornblaser was one, as was Edwin “Red” Cummins, another Missoula boy. Jack Powers, who’d left Missoula with Dornblaser, was an expert.

Dornblaser climbed the ranks quickly, becoming a noncommissioned officer and earning his rank of corporal. In May of 1918 he began writing letters to his old Missoula connections, asking a favor of them. “Will you write a letter to me as to my reputation and character while in Missoula,” he wrote in one letter. “The purpose of the letter is to have such a one ready should an opportunity for advancement come and one should be required I will then be in readiness to comply.” Dornblaser received 11 letters in all. They were signed by the secretary of the Hell Gate Elk’s Lodge; an official from the lumber department of the Anaconda Copper Mining Company; two Missoula attorneys; the president of the Montana Bar Association; Asa Duncan, the fourth judicial district court judge; an Army captain; Frank Woody, the assistant attorney general of Montana; U.S. Senator Henry L. Myers; and U.S. Representatives John M. Evans and Jeannette Rankin, the former of whom was a family friend and the first woman elected to the Congress. Dornblaser folded each letter and tucked them in his wallet.

Five days after the last letter arrived, Dornblaser shipped for France.

He saw his first day of action five months later, on September 12, 1918, after a reassignment to the 82nd company of the 6th Marine Regiment. Rain fell as he marched eight kilometers through the woods to the trench and no man’s land beyond. In the

hastily made dugout that night, he recalled the thrills of the day. *Went out into No mans land and over the top this morning. A terrific barrage! Wonderful to me! Tanks, trenches and advancing lines - wonderful!*

Things turned grim as he saw the prisoners, wounded and dead over the next few days. The shells began landing closer. *Two observation balloons brought down. Many aviation battles and not a few brought down. Many killed.* He managed to hold his composure. *Have a more firm grasp of myself than I thought I would have.* He slept on the side of the road, in dugouts, in the rain. It leaked under his poncho. One day he bathed in a sewer. *Had a hell of a stomach ache and did not sleep at all. Got up during the night several times.* Gas mask drills in the afternoon and church service on Sunday. Card games when he could, and sometimes one meal a day. A new assignment to a machine gun battalion.

By October Dornblaser had taken the train and hiked 30 kilos to another stretch of the front, near the Argonne forest, near Blanc Mont Ridge. The fighting intensified, and trips over the top were more frequent. On October 3 he lead a group and advanced three kilometers. One of his men was hit along the way. They came back and were told to prepare to leave. In the woods along the road back, a shell came bouncing along next to them. A dud.

Dornblaser ducked in another shallow trench the next day, writing in his diary. Shells burst and showered him with dirt. He advanced on an enemy machine gun emplacement and dodged fire, returning unharmed. In the morning he and the men advanced again and dug in.

The next day, under heavy shell fire, Paul Logan Dornblaser lay in the shallow trench on a hillside in western France and scribbled in his diary.

Oct. 6th Sunday... Our losses were heavy this morning... The machine gun ahead opened up and gave us hell. This sure is some no bon sector. A boy on my left has just relieved himself and was hit with two machine guns through his trousers. They can see us better than we can see them. We are now standing by. ...Some Hell!

To this he added one more line. *Heavy shelling, seemingly from all directions.*

They are the last words written in his diary.

The details of what happened next, on October 8, 1918, vary considerably but share a common ending. For certain, Corporal Paul Logan Dornblaser, 6th United States Marine Corps Regiment, 2nd Division, emerged from his trench, was shot by German fire and died a short time later. From there, accounts differ.

One letter says he was hit by sniper fire, gasped his last words and collapsed. Another says he was shot in the leg, hobbled back, proclaimed, “Boys give me a cigarette they’ve got me,” and died a few days later. Both accounts are suspect, written years or decades after Dornblaser’s death by second- and third-hand sources. A third, more substantiated version of the story may be closer to the truth. T.F. Dornblaser, Paul’s father, wrote in his autobiography that his son had been over the top twice that day without receiving injury. When his relief came on duty, the officers, citing their inexperience, asked, “Is there any man here that will guide us and show us where the enemy’s machine gun nests are?” The captain of Dornblaser’s company wrote to T.F. explaining what happened next.

“Your son Paul volunteered to point out to them the enemy’s position,” he wrote. T.F. then added, “While doing so he was mortally wounded; he was literally riddled with machine gun bullets . . . He lived about twenty-four hours after he was wounded. There was no hope of saving his life. The doctor and the nurse each wrote me a letter, telling me how bravely my son bore his sufferings, and assuring me that all that was possible was done to ease his dying hours.”

A *Montana Kaimin* article confirms this report, saying, “A German machine gun nest that had not been wiped out by the advance, got into action and the former Montana student was hit in the hips by machine gun bullets.” The same article quotes Lieutenant Mort J. Donoghue, a former student: “I have looked up Dorn’s official death records,” he said. “Dorn died of gunshot wounds in both the hips and thighs, received in action in the line of duty of the Champagne front.”

Folded in his wallet, tucked in a pocket, were the letters of recommendation Dornblaser had received should he have a chance at advancement. Of the German bullets that killed him, one stuck his wallet, piercing the letters. The bullet hole is still visible today.

Dornblaser was buried in France, at the cemetery in Cuperly. He and the rest of the fallen were later exhumed and reinterred at the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery, the largest American military cemetery in Europe, on Blanc Mont. A bit of his story, however, had yet to be told.

F.L. Golden, a soldier from Arkansas, was serving in the 36th Division, 142 Regt., Co. G on October 28, 1918, when he confronted a German prisoner and looked inside his bread

pouch. There, Golden found two small pieces of jewelry. Never learning how the prisoner obtained them, Golden kept them for his own and brought them back to Arkansas after the war ended a few weeks later.

In early 1922, another man named L.H. Southmayd was riding the streetcar in Fort Smith, Arkansas, when he noticed an unusual stickpin in the conductor's necktie. Looking closer, Southmayd recognized it as a fraternity pin, which was strange, as the conductor didn't strike him as the college sort. On a subsequent ride, Southmayd spied the same conductor, again wearing the stickpin. This time he inquired as to its origin. The pin was a German war emblem, the conductor told him. Southmayd had his doubts. He looked closer and recognized the design as the Sigma Chi coat of arms. The conductor was F.L. Golden, who said he obtained the pin during the war, from the bread pouch of a German prisoner. Also in the pouch, he said, was a small watch fob shaped like a football. "Paul Dornblaser, Left Tackle" the inscription read on one side. "Montana Champions, 1913," on the other.

Shortly after, Southmayd wrote to the Sigma Chi fraternity explaining what he'd found, and Golden soon received a letter from the governor of Montana requesting the fob and pin. Golden complied and sent them to Governor Joseph Dixon, who in turn sent them to the president of the University of Montana. Two years later, UM President Charles H. Clapp tracked down Mrs. Moore, Dornblaser's aunt, who was living at the time in California. Mrs. Moore passed them down through the family, and in 1988, Dornblaser's great-nephew, Paul D. Phillips, brought them to campus during a visit. Today they reside in the University of Montana library archives.

Farther south on campus, another part Dornblaser's example lives on, bettering athletics at Montana. Four months after his death, in February 1919, the Missoula Rotary Club met and adopted a resolution. They suggested that Montana Field, the university's football field, be renamed in honor of a former team captain who'd recently died at war. The university accepted the change, renaming it Dornblaser Field. Football games were played there until 1986, when they were moved to Washington-Grizzly Stadium. Today Dornblaser Field is home to UM's track and field stadium.

Dornblaser's father was perhaps hardest hit by the news of Paul's death. "As soon as I heard that my son, Paul Logan, was killed and buried in France I determined to visit his grave as soon as I could arrange to do so," he wrote in his autobiography. He visited the grave many times, living in Europe for several years after the death of this wife. He further wrote of "my youngest son, on whose strong arm I hoped to lean on in my old age..." The old Civil War veteran's view of war soured. On his 100th birthday in 1941, he told a *Chicago Tribune* reporter that he believe the Revolutionary and Civil Wars were just, but the World War was "for nothing."

"He expressed fervent hope," the article continued, "that 'the mistake will not be repeated' and that no American boys will ever be sacrificed on European soil again."

In recognition of reaching 100 and to help fete the man and his son, the University of Montana sent as a birthday greeting a sprig of pine from the tree planted on campus on Arbor Day, 1919, as part of Memorial Row, in honor of his son.

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APPENDIX A: ADDITIONAL IMAGES AND MATERIAL



James Claude Simpkins, standing, second from right. Undated photo.
Courtesy James E. & Elizabeth Simpkins.



Missoula High School, 1909. Bottom Row, second from left: James Claude Simpkins. Middle Row, fourth from right: Edward Simpkins.
Courtesy James E. & Elizabeth Simpkins.



James Claude Simpkins Commendation Signed by President Woodrow Wilson. Courtesy James E. & Elizabeth Simpkins.



Commendation for James Claude Simpkins from the French Government. Courtesy James E. & Elizabeth Simpkins.



Robert H. Williams, James Simpkins Closest Friend During WWI and Author of Joyful Trek.
Courtesy Donald Williams.



ON ACTIVE SERVICE
WITH THE
AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES

23rd September 1918

Dear Mr. Simpkins, -

I just this morning learned of the sad fate which Claud had, and I can hardly believe that it is true. I saw him just a few days ago and, as usual had an exchange of ideas as to our work. I never dreamed then that it was the last time I should see him.

The Colonel of the Second Pursuit Group is writing you and I suppose he will tell you all that is known of the particulars. I know you are anxious to learn every thing about it, tho' and if

Letter from Robert H. Williams to James Simpkins. Courtesy James E. & Elizabeth Simpkins.

there is any information I can give you I shall be glad to do so. I have known Jimmie for just a year, having met him the first day we put on a uniform, at Austin, Texas, September 16, 1917. We have been together practically all the time since that date, and his loss means more to me than to lose any other friend I have ever had. In fact, I did not realize how much I was depending on him for his advice and companionship. I am proud to have had the friendship of such a man, even though it is but to mourn his loss. He will still be with me in memory. It is a sad thing

to think about but you know
it is true Quater Simpkins,
that the Country always
sacrifices Her best men first.

This is very sad news to
you; yet I know you can
not regret having had such
a son to give to the cause
for which he fought. He did
not live as long as we
should like to have him, but
I only hope I shall be the
man at fifty that he
was at twenty-five.

I am looking for the
address of his brother
Edward, but may not
find it. Will you please
send it to me?

When I get a chance

I shall go to Foul and
try to get some pictures
of Jimmie's grave for you.

Do not hesitate to let
me know of anything
you would like to have
done, as it will be a
pleasure to me to help
you.

Kindest regards to you
and all Jimmie's friends.

Sincerely,

Robt. H. Williams,
2nd Lt. Air Service,
First Army,
American C. F.

REV. J. N. MACLEAN, D. D.
MINISTER
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

MISSOULA, MONTANA. July 10, 1912

Dear Mrs Dornblaser,

Your letter received last winter has lain a long time unanswered, so long that I am thoroughly ashamed of ^{myself} it. I hope you will not think that my neglect regarding your letter is any evidence that I did not appreciate the motherly spirit breathing through it, or that I am in any way indifferent to the object of your solicitude. I am not going to bother you with my excuses, but assure you that mine is all the fault.

I know your son Paul very well, and like every body else who knows him here I respect him very highly. He is "straight goods." I have not been able to get him to work in the Sunday school, but he has a rather formidable excuse. We tried to get him to take a class of boys last winter, and just at the present time I am doing my best to get him to take charge of the Boys Scouts, a work for which he is admirably fitted. The boys are very anxious to have ^{him} take charge. But this is the excuse Paul gives, and I must say I have a good deal of sympathy with it. He has the work of two ordinary men on his shoulders. He has the full work of a university student, and all the extras he does seem to me about a man's full work in themselves. He could not very well get out of foot ball last fall. The pressure upon him from all quarters was very strong. He made an honest effort to get out of it, but students and professors and citizens pressed him into service. A man has certain obligations to his university outside of his class work; and, while football continues a university feature, perhaps a man who can play foot ball should, under certain circumstances, do so. However that may be, I feel sure that good honest application to one's studies is a Christian duty, and I would not require of a student in the way of church work any thing that would interfere with that duty.

Letter from The Rev. John Maclean to Mrs. Dornblaser. Courtesy Paul D. Phillips.

REV. J. N. MACLEAN, D. D.
MINISTER
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

MISSOULA, MONTANA.

The outside work that Paul does in the way of self help takes up a great deal of his time, and keeps him busy. Now just whether teaching in a Sunday school or managing a Boy's Scout Brigade should be added is a question. Paul thinks he could not do them justice, and at the same time do justice to the other work which he has on hand. I must say that he finds me rather easy to be put in sympathy with that view. I know the danger is to get out of line with church work during these strenuous college years, but I believe Paul is not one who will. Many do, but I believe he will not.

I know something of the anxieties of a mother's heart for her boy far away, but for you there is the confidence that is in God that yours shall be kept on the way of noble manhood. "No harm shall befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy DWELLING." The child of your so many prayers is the child of the heavenly Father's ^{care} ~~prayers~~.

Assuring you that Paul has the highest respect of every one who knows him, and that I count him among my friends,

I am most respectfully yours,

J. Maclean.

Mont Brenan

This is Paul's
Diary, which he
wrote in the Trenches
in France, just be-
fore he was killed -

October 8th 1918 -
just one Month be-
fore the Armistice.

This must be
preserved by all
means.

D. F. Dornblaser
Father

Excerpt from Paul Logan Dornblaser's Diary. Courtesy Paul D. Phillips.

T. FRANK DORNBLASER

PHYSICIAN AND SURGEON

(10) WALNUT CREEK, OHIO

Van Westerdorf gave me a Luger. Dug in and as me, Degmon and F. contemplated outdugout, we were told to stand by. Saw Hart, and got his rations and canteen. The boche retreated and we have had no artillery fire this morning. Am glad for it. Had chow of German Gaulash and salvaged hard bread. Had a paper and learned we were in the Campaign Sector. Had 11 in group to shovel. Have some souvenirs to send home. Advanced across hill where we dug in again. Had chow at 8:30. Deg and F. Slept together. Cummie wounded from shell fire.

Oct. 6th Sunday,

Heavy shell fire. To start over. Formed two skimmish lines. Advanced in our own barrage. Luckily no one was killed. As we advanced the front line of skermmishers shot from the hip and the boche came down over the trenches on the hill shouting, "Kamerad".--As we came to the trenches the Captain was wounded. Went to a dug out and ~~shouted~~, "Comen se Dvin", and 15 boche came out, hands over their heads, shouting, "Pardon Kamerad"! One little kid about 18 was so small and fatigued I let him stay until he could become more composed. The machine gun ahead opened up and gave us hell. Red, O'Niel, Sully, Ryan, Lynch and Kather came with me to join the 2nd platoon in the first line. Lynch and I were together and shot at some boche we saw. Lynch said, "I'm an expert; let me get one". I got one, and two shots through the head was the result. He fell almost against me. The shots entered his cheek and the top of his head.

F. FRANK DORNBLASER
PHYSICIAN AND SURGEON

(11) WALNUT CREEK, OHIO _____

He was willing, game boy and I was heartsick to see him lying beside me. The 15th Machine Gun Company came up. Sgt. Kelly was placing his gun when he fell backwards killed. The boche had us stopped for a time. Our losses were heavy this morning. As I sit in a shallow trench and write this I see three comrades dead within 50 feet of me. There are five of the first platoon with the second now. Lt. Backwith has been wounded. We have no one in charge of company. Have just heard Lt. Lucas is in charge of Co. This sure is some no bon (no good) sector. A boy on my left has just relieved himself and was hit with two machine guns through his trousers. They can see us better than we can see them. We are now standing by. Just went out behind our lines 10 feet to get more ammunition for emergency; rolled over a fellow and it was Corporal Graham of our platoon. Some Hell!-Just heard Ferry was killed. Hardin told me he is in some trench 20 feet to my right. Heavy shelling, seemingly from all directions.



S. C. FORD, ATTORNEY GENERAL
 FRANK WOODY)
 R. L. MITCHELL) ASSISTANTS
 A. A. GRODRUD)
 A. W. HEIDEL, LAW CLERK
 LUCILLE B. LUKE, STENOGRAPHER



HELENA May 20, 1918.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I have been acquainted with Mr. Paul L. Dornblaser, now with the 109th Company, 8th Regiment, U.S.M.C., for a number of years, first becoming acquainted with him while he was attending the State University at Missoula, Montana.

During the time he was a student at the University he was recognized as a leader among the students, and I know was regarded very highly by both the students and the faculty.

After graduation he practiced law in Missoula up to the time of his enlistment in the Marine Corps being for two years Deputy County Attorney of Missoula County.

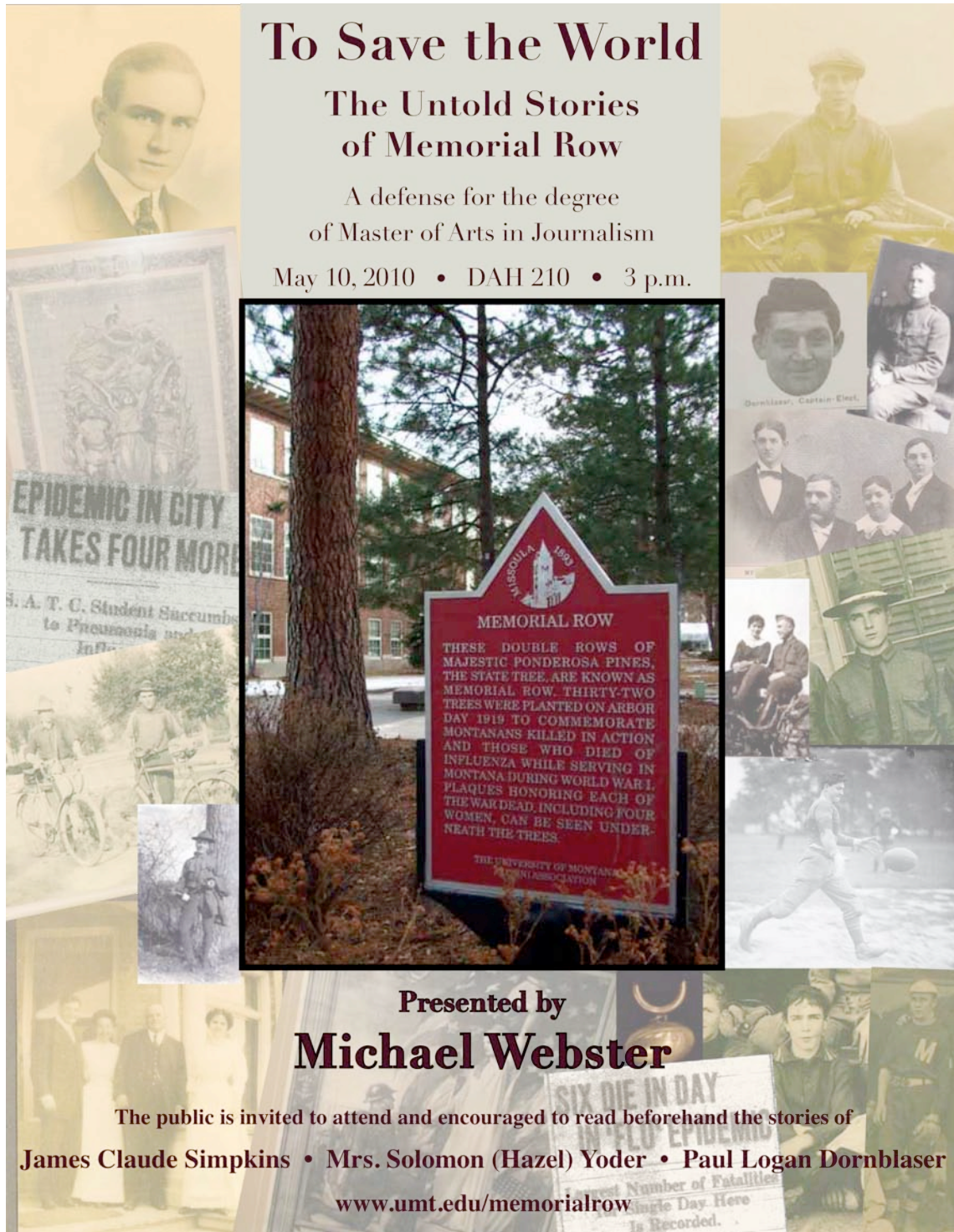
I have always had a very high regard for him and I know that he was always regarded while in Missoula as a high class young man and one worthy of every confidence which might be reposed in him.

LL-FW

Assistant Attorney General.

Frank Woody

Letter of Recommendation for Paul Dornblaser from Montana Assistant Attorney General Frank Woody. A Machine Gun Bullet Struck the Letter while It Was Folded in Dornblaser's Wallet. Three Bullet Holes Are Visible. Courtesy Paul D. Phillips.



To Save the World

The Untold Stories of Memorial Row

A defense for the degree of Master of Arts in Journalism

May 10, 2010 • DAH 210 • 3 p.m.

MEMORIAL ROW

THESE DOUBLE ROWS OF MAJESTIC PONDEROSA PINES, THE STATE TREE, ARE KNOWN AS MEMORIAL ROW. THIRTY-TWO TREES WERE PLANTED ON ARBOR DAY 1919 TO COMMEMORATE MONTANANS KILLED IN ACTION AND THOSE WHO DIED OF INFLUENZA WHILE SERVING IN MONTANA DURING WORLD WAR I. PLAQUES HONORING EACH OF THE WAR DEAD, INCLUDING FOUR WOMEN, CAN BE SEEN UNDERNEATH THE TREES.

THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA
MONTANA ASSOCIATION

Presented by
Michael Webster

The public is invited to attend and encouraged to read beforehand the stories of
James Claude Simpkins • Mrs. Solomon (Hazel) Yoder • Paul Logan Dornblaser

www.umt.edu/memorialrow

SIX DIE IN DAY IN FLO EPIDEMIC
Largest Number of Fatalities in Single Day. Here Is Recorded.