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Bravery Under Fire: The Diary of a World War I Soldier

By Natalie Fulk

Thomas Vander Veen was a Dutch-American soldier in World War I who fought on the Western Front in France. His main job was as a messenger, and he carried messages between his company commander at the front and the post commander at the rear. He wrote a diary of his experiences in the war which dates from October 2, 1918, to the armistice at the end of the war on November 12, 1918. After the war ended, he earned a Distinguished Service Cross for his bravery in delivering messages, specifically in battle from October 10-13, 1918. His diary (which he found left behind by a German soldier fleeing from Vander Veen's patrol) is an extraordinary first-person account of the end of World War I and provides a personal narrative of one man fighting on the Western Front.

Before diving into the diary's contents themselves, it is important to have some background on Thomas Vander Veen. According to his nephew, Gus Vander Veen, Thomas Vander Veen immigrated to the United States from the Netherlands sometime before the beginning of World War I and was living in California. When the war broke out in Europe in 1914, the Netherlands called back its citizens who were residing abroad to join the Dutch army in preparation for potential conflict. However, Vander Veen decided not to go, and was drafted instead by the United States Army when he was 30 years old. Through the process of being in the army, Vander Veen gained his American citizenship.



During the war, Vander Veen was involved in the last major battle of World War I, the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. The Meuse-Argonne was a battle on the Western Front in France with the objective of driving the Germans out of their positions in the area. The Allied force consisted mostly of the American Expeditionary Force and some French and British troops. The offensive started on September 26, 1918, but due to the difficult terrain, the inexperience of the American troops, and the strong German foothold, the offensive was much more difficult and costly than anticipated. With reinforcements, the Americans continued the offensive with a second advance on October 4. There was a third advance on October 14, and some German defenses were beaten, but the offensive did not make much progress until early November. Finally, with the signing of the armistice by the Germans, the battle and the war stopped on November 11.¹

Vander Veen's journal starts on October 2, 1918, but he began by describing his experiences starting about a week before that. He and his company started out camping in the woods southwest of Verdun, a small city in the northeast part of France. They marched for a while in the rain and then stayed two nights in a village before leaving for the front. At the front, Vander Veen was part of the first phase of the battle and launched the first offensive

(continued on page 2)

From the Director



The summer was a busy one for the staff of the Joint Archives of Holland. Our main article in this issue is the work of Hope College senior Natalie Fulk and illustrates the many hours of transcribing an original World War I diary, researching its creator and his military activities, and writing a cohesive story of his last year in service. The second article is by Wally Ewing and continues the story of the Ottawa County Red Cross during and following World War II. Lastly, Eva Dean Folkert of Hope College's Public Affairs and Marketing team highlights the research and writing that three students did last summer using many primary sources found in the Joint Archives. I hope that you enjoy reading about all of these exciting projects.

Geoffrey D. Reynolds

Bravery Under Fire (continued from page 1)

against the German defensive positions. Fighting went on for a few days, and included artillery and machine gun fire. It was a combination of each side going over the trenches and firing barrages at each other. There were even air battles going on overhead. Vander Veen says, "Some Germ[an] observer plane came down about 100 yds from us. All in flames. Shot down by 2 of our scouting planes. Great sight and causing great stir. Lots of cheers and hurrahs. Saw one shot down by M G [machine gun] five days previous. But some of our planes were shot down by Germans and 2 balloons also."²

Afterwards, the Americans retreated about half a mile and regrouped. The next day they advanced again, and on the morning after that, Vander Veen's company was sent to immediate reserve. Vander Veen talked about the morale of the soldiers so far after an advance that was brutal and didn't gain as much as they had hoped. He says, "Opinion is all alike and all like to be relieved and go back. They all have their belly full of it and so have I. Have seen some awful sights."³ Later, though, he said, "Good news from all over the front. Bulgaria has quit, Allies advancing everywhere. I think end of war is coming soon."⁴ While morale was down among the troops, they were still buoyed up by hearing good news about the end of the war.

On October 3, Vander Veen started out his entry saying, "Entered service of Uncle Sam's army one year ago today."⁵ Shells were raining down on them and they had to be in a dugout for the whole night. The next morning, the Allies launched a second large advance. Vander

Veen's company was still in reserve, but he described the attack as a "very intense barrage by our guns early this morning, guns just back of us. Enemies' reply rather weak. Our troops went over the top this morning under protection of barrage."⁶ This attack went on for several days, with Vander Veen and his company getting bombarded the entire time. Vander Veen expressed how all of the men were wanting to get moved back from the front and be relieved, as they had been near the front for over ten days.

On October 9, instead of being relieved, Vander Veen and his company were moved back to the very front. During this time and often through his diary, Vander Veen expressed his frustrations about being at the front so much and the contradiction between what the newspapers were saying about the experiences of American soldiers and their actual reality. He said of the current condition of his company:

Co. gradually dwindling, some wounded, some sick and many others that simply fell back and turned yellow... And then their papers say the Americans are so brave and always eager to fight. But if those people back in the States could hear the men here now they would probably think differently. They are all sick of it and hoping their damnest the war will end soon and that we leave this place here as soon as possible and get a real seat back to civilization... There is a lot of peace talk and placersunners in the air or in the papers lately. We all hope they may prove true although it seems too good to be true. However it seems as though there is to be an end of this war before very long. But I hope they take us out of this hole to a good place in the rear pretty soon. With so many American troops in France now (in Sept. alone over 300,000 arrived) I can't see why they don't relieve us and send some of these new men up to the line.⁷

All of the soldiers wanted to be sent off the front and go back to the United States, or even just be sent back to the rear, away from the fighting.

However, this did not happen for them. They took up positions in the woods and the next morning went over the top with protection from an Allied barrage. It was a harsh couple of days; Vander Veen described it as "Very uncomfortable, no protection. Dark in those woods and roads and everything muddy. We just dropped down on ground. But very cold and nasty. Many men killed in these woods, dead bodies of Americans everywhere."⁸ Those days, between October 10 and October 13, were when Vander Veen was running messages between the front and the rear. He said, "Was bringing messages back



American soldiers fighting in France, ca. 1918

and forth between our Co. [Company] and Batt P.C. [Battalion Port Commander] farther back in several times Friday and Saturday. Pretty dangerous from shell fire and snipers, many snipers left in woods doing much damage to runners, etc. Extra men were sent with me sometimes to forward the message if I was bumped off, but they never got me, although coming might close.”⁹

The advance reached its objective, but Vander Veen’s company lost many men. He said that many men were wounded and killed, and one of the men was even captured. It was hard for the wounded men to get treated because there was so many. He even mentioned one of his good friends being killed, saying, “One of my best pals he was and I sure cried when I heard of his death. It seems as though it is always the best fellows most liked in the Co. that get killed.”¹⁰ Vander Veen and his company felt their losses deeply, and morale was especially low. They expected to be relieved after this advance, but were mistaken again.

Starting on October 18, Vander Veen’s company began hiking around to different barracks, dugouts, and farms farther back from the front. He was relieved to be away from the front and seeing more of France, but also commented on how tiring the constant moving around was. He said at one point, “We have seen some very nice scenery lately, the only trouble was we were moving too fast as a rule to take notice of the scenery or our nose was too close to the ground dragging our weary bodies along.”¹¹ At one of their encampments, the YMCA [Young Men’s Christian Association] put on a vaudeville show for the troops, which included speeches, jokes, stories, and singing. He commented that the show was very good and picked up the morale of the men for a brief time.

It seemed as if Vander Veen’s company would be going back to the front. However, things turned around for him

because he was chosen to be one of ten men to be sent to a resort named Mont Dore in France. He praised the resort and the comforts it offered for him, especially as he was recovering from a cold. The vacation was funded through the YMCA and he said, “The YMCA has a swell big building with casino where all kinds of entertainments are given free also and we can buy candy and drink etc. there at small cost.”¹² On the third day of the trip, Vander Veen and other men on vacation went to Lake du Guéry for a day trip. The vacation lasted seven days, and Vander Veen was very grateful for the experience, especially as it gave him a chance to recover his health and eat decent food.



YMCA providing entertainment to weary troops, ca. 1918

It took him and the other men three days to find their company after their vacation. They found them on November 10, just in time to hear all the news and rumors surrounding the armistice with Germany and the end of the war. He said on November 10, “Seems to be certain peace is very near and according to latest reports tonight the Germans have signed the terms of the armistice and down before them by Gen. Foch they had till tomorrow 11 A.M. to sign the and if they have not signed them yet I think they will sign them alright.”¹³ The next day, however, the day fighting was supposed to stop, Vander Veen was having his doubts that the armistice was real. He said of that morning, “The Frenchman we met all said too ‘le Guerre finis’ but we could hardly believe it yet as we would hear the big guns still pounding away ... they ceased firing too at two minutes to eleven we heard afterwards and the guns sure raised hell proper the last few minutes the barrage was the heaviest at the last moment when they all suddenly ceased.”¹⁴ All the Allied soldiers were very happy to know that their wishes for the end of the war were coming true. He described the mood as such: “It sure made us feel good. Smiles on everybody’s face, the French not the least.... Last night after dark many bonfires and lots of cheering going on.”¹⁵ The next day, Vander Veen said the conditions of the armistice were posted up for his company so that they could all read it. His journal ends on that day, November 12, 1918.

Vander Veen received a Distinguished Service Cross for his efforts during the war, but specifically for his actions

on October 10-13 of 1918. The U.S. Department of Defense describes this medal as such:

The Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) is the second highest military decoration that can be awarded to a member of the United States Army... It is awarded for extraordinary heroism: while engaged in action against an enemy of the United States; while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force; or while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party.¹⁶

In the *Military Times Record* of his medal, his actions are described:

As company liaison agent, Private First Class Vander Veen maintained continual contact between his company commander and the battalion Post Commander, repeatedly exposing himself to artillery, machine-gun and sniper's fire to deliver important messages. On one occasion it was necessary for him to pass through the German and our own barrages, but he accomplished this mission fearlessly, showing marked personal bravery.

He was appreciated for his bravery during this conflict and in the integral role he played.

Thomas Vander Veen's account of his experiences during World War I are a valuable source of what an American soldier was doing, thinking, and feeling on the front. He faced many challenges, not only in battle, but in the wearisome marching, sickness, lack of soldier morale at times, and the struggle with the feeling that war was not what the American press made it out to be. Through his account, people one hundred years in the future from this conflict can connect to him and the reality that he confronted.

Endnotes

¹Brown, George, "The Meuse-Argonne Offensive and the End of the War," *An American Soldier in World War I*, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 126-129.

²Thomas Vander Veen Diary, Oct. 2, 1918, Joint Archives of Holland.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Thomas Vander Veen Diary, Oct. 3, 1918.

⁶Thomas Vander Veen Diary, Oct. 4, 1918.

⁷Thomas Vander Veen Diary, Oct. 15, 1918.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Thomas Vander Veen Diary, Oct. 27, 1918.

¹²Thomas Vander Veen Diary, Oct. 30, 1918.

¹³Thomas Vander Veen Diary, Nov. 10, 1918.

¹⁴Thomas Vander Veen Diary, Nov. 12, 1918.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶U.S. Department of Defense, "Military Awards for Valor-Top 3," *Description of Awards*, <http://valor.defense.gov/Description-of-Awards/>.

About the author:



Natalie Fulk is a senior from Mahomet, Illinois. She is majoring in History, Spanish, and Political Science. After graduation, she plans to go to law school.



Holland Museum Archives

Ottawa County Red Cross 1941-1950

Wallace K. Ewing

With roots going back to at least 1908, the Ottawa County Chapter of the American Red Cross was officially chartered in 1917, at the start of World War I. Services rendered during that conflict firmly embedded the Red Cross in the American consciousness. The local chapter managed to survive the post-war years, the boom of the '20s, the ensuing bust of the next decade, and enter the 1940s with confidence. Although the details changed, the basic mission of the Red Cross, locally and nationally, remained unchanged: to assist people in times of emergency and stress.

In 1940, Ottawa County was still very much a rural area with approximately 60,000 residents: 14,600 in the City of Holland, 8,800 in Grand Haven, and the rest scattered throughout the many townships. Most county roads were gravel. U.S. 31 zigzagged through Grand Haven, following the Pere Marquette railroad tracks most of the

way south until the highway entered Holland by River Avenue. As the decades passed and as the wartime effort heated up, the Red Cross spent less time and resources assisting a dwindling number of indigent World War I veterans and more time contributing to domestic services at the start of the '40s.



*Ernest Brooks,
ca. 1940*

Although some new names appeared on the chapter's board of directors in 1940, most were carryovers from the previous decade. Earnest Brooks of Holland was chair; Madge Bresnahan of Grand Haven and Harry Derks of Holland were vice chairs; Sam Bosch of Holland was secretary; Otto Kramer of Holland was treasurer; and Ernest Hartman, also of Holland, was Kramer's assistant. Other board members

were Fred Bolt, Lawrence Dornbos, and Homer Fisher, all of Grand Haven; Alfred C. Joldersma, Gerritt J. Van Duren, and William Vandenberg, from Holland; Kate Boonstra and Elizabeth Veneklasen from Zeeland; Henry Stegeman, of Hudsonville; and Albert E. Stickley, a physician from Coopersville.

In the first year of the decade, World War I veterans continued to need some attention. One veteran, who worked at a CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] camp, imbibed too much and was sent home. The Red Cross was asked to intervene and apologize for him, since he "would like to earn a decent living for his wife." Because it was discovered that the vet had been dishonorably discharged, he was ineligible for re-entry or enrollment in any CCC camp.

Another veteran, who had been wounded accidentally while performing his military duties, asked the Red Cross to help him get a Purple Heart. Since his unit was not in active duty at the time he was wounded, the vet didn't qualify for the medal. In two other cases, burial reimbursement was sought for a veteran's widow, and money was given to a vet and his wife to return to their home in Lansing. As in the '30s, indigent veterans occasionally were given supper at Rusty's Place [208 River Avenue in Holland].

As they had done during World War I and shortly thereafter, Red Cross volunteers made garments for shipment overseas, particularly to war-ravished countries, such as Poland.

In 1940, Nell Wichers of Holland began teaching the Red Cross course "Home Hygiene and Care of the Sick"

to a class of fifteen in Jamestown; additional classes were requested for Grand Haven, Borculo, and Olive Center. Lloyd Brown of Coopersville taught first aid classes and awarded 95 certificates. Traveler's Aid continued to be an important service, and in late 1940 assistance was sent to a Grand Haven couple stranded in Tennessee.


Financial reports for 1940 show the chapter spent "98 c. for a pair of rubbers for a transient who was almost barefoot and soaked; \$2.00 for two months janitor service; and \$3.50 for 14 25 c. meals." In April 1940, the chapter had \$107.69 on hand; it paid out \$18.58 that month, with no income reported. Later in the year, a full-time executive secretary, Dorothy Holmes, was appointed at a salary of \$150 per month, in place of two part-time secretaries. The fund drive that year raised \$5,900 against a goal of \$4,360; a large portion of the total went to the National Red Cross to support its activities. Mrs. Holmes and Mrs. Bosch were named delegates to the national convention to be held in Washington, D.C. that year.

At the annual meeting held at Holland City Hall in January, it was reported that the chapter had 4,949 members, and that it received \$2,103 from the Holland area, \$1,500 from the Grand Haven Community Chest, and \$2,169 from other fund-raising efforts. Beth Marcus, who had directed the Junior Red Cross since the middle '30s, made an "outstanding" report: 119 of the schools in the county reported a total Red Cross youth membership of 10,600. One hundred students enrolled in water safety classes in the Tri-Cities area and 200 in and around Holland. Nominated for new or continuing posts on the board, in addition to Ethel Telling, were Mrs. Bower, Charline Hatton, Mrs. Boonstra, Mrs. Mills, Mrs. Bloomberg, Mrs. Walbrink, Mrs. De Kleine, Madge Bresnehan, Willard Wichers, Mr. Fischer, Mr. Kramer, Mr. Brooks, Mr. Joldersma, and Mr. Bosch. Ethel Telling was elected chair, a post she would hold for several years.

At the same board meeting, Executive Secretary Dorothy Holmes reported that "85% of Red Cross work is done by volunteers," a percentage that didn't vary much over the years. Because the county was divided into two branches, one headquartered in Grand Haven, the other in Holland, the board sought to "coordinate activities of the north/south county offices." In Grand Haven, the chapter office was located at 234½ Washington Street [above the current Oakes Agency office], and the Holland offices were situated at 6 East 8th Street. A motion was made to withdraw from the Grand Haven Community Chest, as required by the National Red Cross office.


Services offered by the chapter at this time were War Relief Production, Home Hygiene and Care of the Sick, First Aid, Junior Red Cross, Civilian Relief, and Water Safety. After Germany's invasion of the Netherlands, the chapter responded to 65 health and welfare inquiries about relatives and friends affected by the hostilities and was able to provide 27 responses. A few months later, it was noted that 600 to 700 Ottawa County residents were in the military service. In July of that year, 1941, Beth Marcus was hired as a part-time clerk at \$10 per week.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, was only nine days old when the chapter was given a goal by the National Red Cross office of \$15,000 for the first War Fund Drive. By February, \$14,000 was in hand, \$18,000 by April, and \$19,000 at the conclusion of the drive in June.



ARC 407
Rev. April 1941
Code L-1

LAYETTE SUGGESTIONS



A few days old and forced to flee. This infant and countless others--so completely helpless--need YOUR help now.

The following are some suggestions for the layettes to be included in the War Relief Production Program.

Items

- 2 Outing Flannel Dresses, open in back. Finished length 20".
- 2 Outing Flannel Gertrudes or Slips. Finished length 20".
- 2 Outing Flannel Gowns, open in front. Finished length 28".
- 2 Knitted Shirts--made from part wool knitted underwear material.
- 2 Pairs Bootees, to be knitted, crocheted or made from outing flannel.
- 2 Flannel Bands, each 6" x 18". (An all wool or a part wool flannel band is preferred. If it is not possible to obtain the part wool flannel, the bands should be made from the cotton flannel.) Each band to be rolled separately and fastened with safety pins.
- 1 Cap made from part wool flannel, or knitted or crocheted.

Little business was recorded for the annual meeting held in January 1942. Undoubtedly, thoughts and energies were directed toward the shock of the December 7 attack and the rapidly developing war effort. Several new names appeared on the board roster: Wyngarden, Mulder, Loutit, Brower, Mills, Bloomberg, De Kleine, Lokker, Seifert, Dickman, Van Housen, and Hinkamp.

In the spring, Anne De Young, a classmate of Beth Marcus's at Hope College, taught nursing classes on campus, while Nell Wichers continued to teach Home

Hygiene and Care of the Sick. A regiment of residents was authorized to teach the Red Cross course titled Home Nursing. In addition to De Young and Wichers were Dorothy Ebel, William C. Kools, Susan Zelenka, Mrs. Tysman, and Mrs. Kieft, all of Holland; Mrs. Kelly, Cornelia Floto, Mrs. De Witt, Mary Ernst, Mrs. Fairbanks, Margaret Baas, Mrs. Dornbos, Grace Hostetter, Mrs. Stille, and Mrs. D'Oyly, each from Grand Haven; and Mrs. Bolthouse from Spring Lake. A few months later, Mrs. Fett, Charline Hatton, Olive Harbeck, Margaret Berg, Mrs. Braak, Hazel Babcock, and Gertrude Sherwood, all of Grand Haven, were also authorized. Added to the list of people eligible to teach first aid and junior first aid was Mildred Oatley, a teacher at Grand Haven Central School.



Anne De Young, ca. 1942

A director's meeting in June, with Ethel Telling presiding, presented an operating budget of \$9,925 for the fifteen months between April 1942 and June 1943. At that meeting it was decided that all committees should be county-wide, under a single chair, with the possibility of a vice chair being added. About the same time, the chapter took on the responsibility of partially equipping Fort Custer Station Hospital in Battle Creek with in-kind contributions, an effort that continued for several years.

For the year, the chapter raised \$46,400, with \$18,000 of the total coming from the northern half of the county. In the same year, still 1941, the annual meeting was moved to November, and a new slate of board members was presented for election. Among the new names were Mrs. Miller, Mr. Batson, and Mrs. West for the north half of the county, and Mr. Selby for the south half. Ethel Telling was re-elected chair, while Mr. Loutit and Mrs. Brower were elected vice chairs, Sam Bosch, secretary, Otto Kramer, treasurer, and Mrs. Marsilje, assistant treasurer. In July 1942, Otto Kramer resigned and John Mikula of Holland was appointed treasurer to replace him.

In March 1943, Helen Sencer was appointed executive secretary of the south half, at an annual salary of \$2,400, with the stipulation that she establish residency in Holland. A resident of Grand Rapids at the time, Ms. Sencer chose not to move, and a few months later Beth Marcus took her place. The annual meeting that year was again held in November, and several new members were elected or re-elected to the board: Mrs. West, Spring Lake; Mrs. Siefert, Grand Haven; John Mikula, Holland;

and Mr. Lowing, Georgetown. The budget for the upcoming year was set at \$14,175, 50% higher than the previous year.

The first mention of “payroll deductions” occurred in 1943 in correspondence with labor unions for contributions to the “War Chest Campaign,” a concept that was expanded later in the decade. In 1944, the Red Cross nationally had a target of \$2 million, while the chapter goal was set at \$35,000. The Grand Haven branch exceeded its goal of \$23,000, and county-wide \$40,781 was raised.

By the time of the 1944 annual meeting in November, the number of potential board members was increased from 21 to 33, with 30 actually elected. Officers were Ethel Telling, chair; Mr. Loutit and Rev. Hinkamp, vice chairs; and John Mikula, treasurer. There was no assistant treasurer nor secretary on the slate of nominees, although Peter Kromann of Holland had been elected secretary at the June meeting of the board. The directors also voted to provide \$250 financial assistance to Hope College for an “ASTP unit,” which provided specialized Army training, and revised by-laws were adopted.

With 17 million women in the work force in 1944, an increase of four million since 1940 and representing 30% of all employees, there was a growing recognition of their importance to the economy and to the military. Locally and nationally, the Red Cross strove to involve more women in raising money for the war effort.



Women assisting with a Red Cross mailing, ca. 1944

In 1944, President Franklin Roosevelt proclaimed that March was to be designated Red Cross month, a tradition that continued for decades.

Although the next year, 1945, brought peace in Europe and the Far East, the Ottawa County Red Cross still set an ambitious war fund goal of \$80,105. Records for that year show Betty Broman of Grand Haven for the first time was listed as secretary for Home Services. Also on record were lists of volunteers in charge of the 19 Red

Cross programs, four of which endured through the ensuing decades.

The same year noted the first attempt to provide direct aid to victims of house fires, this time to a family burned out of their home in South Blendon. The type or extent of assistance was not specified.

At a meeting in October 1945, Beth Marcus addressed the board of directors and program chairs: “Just because the war is over, it does not mean that the Red Cross is going out of the picture. In fact, many of our services will now have to be accelerated in order to meet the needs of our community. We plan at this meeting to give you some idea what the future programs of the Red Cross will be.” Each person was asked to bring five guests to a special planning meeting that would set the chapter’s course. During the previous twelve months, the total wages of the executive secretary, three assistants, nurses’ aide teachers, water safety instructors, and janitor services amounted to \$4,535. The board also learned that volunteers contributed an astonishing 411,000 hours to the chapter’s work during the same time, the equivalent of more than 2,000 full-time employees.



Rev. William Warner, ca. 1946

In December 1945, Ethel Telling resigned her position as board chair, and the following February, Rev. William Warner, minister of Grace Episcopal Church in Holland, was named acting chair and elected permanently to that position the next month. Other officers were William Loutit, first vice chair; Willard Wichers, second vice chair; John Mikula, again as treasurer; and Peter Kromann continued as secretary.

The 1946 fund goal was much reduced from previous years, but over \$41,000 was raised nevertheless. During World War II, considerable energy necessarily had been devoted to fund-raising, and the growth in membership and scope of chapter services forced a continuation of that emphasis. Furthermore, the exceptional expansion in the number of volunteers meant a more elaborate, detailed administrative structure had to be developed. For instance, minutes for June 3 summarize the previous month’s activities:

. . . [H]ome service took care of more than 320 veterans cases during the past month, there were given 200 Accident Prevention Certificates, First Aid instruction was given to the Girl Scouts. Water Safety classes were filled to capacity, canteen services at the blood bank where a total of over 200 pints of blood was collected, the production department is yet making clothing for

overseas shipment, etc. Mrs. Merian reported on the Camp and Hospital Committee, which entertained 220 soldiers during Tulip Time, serving two meals and took them on sight-seeing trips and received a very appreciative letter for same. She mentioned that our quota was 100 game prizes and 50 dozen cookies per month and suggested that the township help in procuring these articles.

The blood drive Mrs. Merian referred to was administered out of Lansing and was a continuation of the mobile blood drives that operated during the war to provide plasma to injured troops. In Grand Haven, baking and sending cookies to the veterans' hospital in Battle Creek became a long-standing service. It was estimated in 1995 that more than 200,000 cookies had been shipped since the inception of the project.

Rev. Warner continued as chair into the next year, with Mrs. R. De Bruyn serving as first vice chair, Willard Wichers as second vice chair, Arnold Herter as treasurer, and Peter Kromann continuing as secretary. The budget for that year, 1947, was set at \$24,981 and \$20,180 for the next year. Programs offered were Home Service, Community Service in Camps and Hospitals, Nursing Services, Water Safety, First Aid, Junior Red Cross, and Production. Joan Danhof of Zeeland was named fund campaign chair for her hometown, where she had been a canvasser for several years.

A July 1947 report to the board noted that the north half of the county had an emergency kitchen, medicals centers, and housing centers with equipment and personnel for use in case of a major disaster. Registered nurses, nurse assistants, and practical nurses all pledged their talents. The chapter made a \$500 loan to a Spring Lake family to help in their recovery following a house fire.



Dr. Otto van der Velde, ca. 1948

At the same time, a plea was made for “a new national blood bank for civilians,” an idea that would be brought to reality by Dr. Otto van der Velde, a Holland physician and board member beginning in 1948, the year the concept of the blood bank was implemented. Dr. van der Velde reported that Holland was the first small community in Michigan, and one of very few in the country, to start its own blood bank, patterned after the clinics that collected blood for military personnel during the war. The local blood bank was the key to starting the Michigan blood plasma

program. “During the war there was blood for every soldier who needed it,” van der Velde told the board. “Now we must try to make it available for every citizen who needs it.” The Holland blood bank became a model for other small cities in Michigan and throughout the nation.

At the 1947 annual meeting held in November, Doris Ewing of Grand Haven was the featured speaker. A Red Cross staff member herself, stationed in Calcutta, India, during World War II, Ms. Ewing at this time was attached to Army Special Services at Scott Field in Illinois. She made a plea “for sympathetic understanding of the man in service today” by explaining that “whether or not we liked a peacetime army or approve of universal military training, we should have an army which will contribute to the social, educational, and moral as well as the technical side of our young men.”

In 1948, the following area residents served as chair of the many programs: Mrs. Allen, Gray Ladies; Mrs. Bort, Production; Mrs. Burton, Nurses' Aides; Mrs. Butler, Fund Campaign; Charline Hatton, Home Service; Mr. Klaasen, Disaster Relief; Mrs. Reagan, Canteen; Mr. Schaubel, Water Safety; Miss Urick, Junior Red Cross; Mrs. Kooiman, First Aid; and Mrs. Skaalen, Home Nursing. The fund goal for the year was \$30,209, and it was exceeded by a scant \$127. In his appeal letter to contributors, Rev. Warner said:

As we of the Red Cross come before you—the America people—to ask for your support, we do so in the basic simplicity of its humanitarian appeal. Humanitarianism may fall strangely upon ears turned to the world's present day turbulent thinking. But that strangeness does not daunt us. Instinctively men have always yearned for a common bond of neighborliness and understanding; unexpressed because of the very attitudes of suspicion and distrust prevalent today.

During 1948, Warner continued as chair, Patricia Lowell was first vice chair, Harold Klaasen was second vice chair, Mrs. Kenneth Allen, secretary, and Arnold Hertel, treasurer. Gladys De Vries was named blood donor chair. The board set the current year's budget at \$29,295. At the April meeting of the board, the blood bank was discussed and, at the June meeting, approved for implementation. The chapter worked with the Ottawa County Medical Association, headed at that time by Dr. William Winter of Holland, approving the plan. The Fraternal Order of Eagles provided a refrigerator to store the donated blood, and Holland Community Hospital promised a back-up. Zeeland Hospital agreed to participate in the blood bank, but Grand Haven Hospital rejected the idea.

Although the chapter had been an early member of various area Community Chests, national policy had required it to withdraw after the 1940 campaign. In December 1948 the need for new dollars forced a change in policy, and the chapter rejoined the Chest, forerunner of today's Community Campaign. At the year's annual meeting, held at St. John's Guild Hall in Grand Haven, the main speaker was Gerald R. Ford, Disaster Chair of the Kent County Red Cross. The following year, Mr. Ford was elected to the House of Representatives from the Fifth Congressional District.



Holland Museum Archives

Blood drive donor and medical personnel, ca. 1949

In 1949, several new board members were added: Miller Sherwood and Mrs. Glenn Olsen of Grand Haven; Henry Maentz and George Copeland of Holland; and Alice Geerlings of Zeeland. This year saw the rise of the "1½ % Matching Fund Plan," which allowed employee payroll charitable deductions for the first time, with matching donations from employers. Participating companies in the Grand Haven area included Anderson-Bolling, Bastian-Blessing, Burnside, Challenge, Dake, Eagle Ottawa, Grand Haven Brass, Michigan Plastic Products, Miller Smith, and Story & Clark Piano Company. A similar single solicitation plan was put forward in Holland, but apparently without success. An August 1949 letter on joint fund raising reported that "Federated industrial solicitation" was not approved by the National Red Cross. The Community Chest for 1949 proposed a goal of \$30,000 to \$35,000, with 21.5% of that goal going to the Red Cross, 13.9% to the polio office, and 64.6% earmarked for the Community Chest for a variety of needs. A letter dated November 1949 from Oswin W. Lowry of Park Township, owner and president of Plycurves in Holland, said that deductions must go directly to the Red Cross and "not through any other organization's hands." All donors were to receive Red Cross membership cards.

The blood bank concept slowly gathered support. Nine units were collected at the first drive in Zeeland, and the "biggest blood drive to date" in Holland raised 28 units

of blood in June 1949. Dr. van der Velde noted that the blood bank was officially launched in July 1948, and that 60 units had been collected by the end of the following January.

Susan Lowell and Richard Larson were named Junior Red Cross delegates to the National Red Cross to be held in Atlantic City in the fall of 1949. Stephanie Yurick, a teacher in a Grand Haven elementary school, was the chaperone. In October, Warner resigned for health reasons, but accepted a leave of absence until a replacement could be found. Nominated to the board were Gladys Olsen, Miller Sherwood, and Elizabeth Sherk, all of Grand Haven, Katherine Boersma, Henry Maentz, and George Copeland, each from Holland, and Alice of Geerlings of Zeeland.



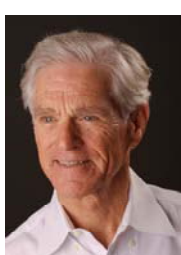
Holland Museum Archives

Youngers learning to swim with the help of a Red Cross instructor, 1951

Swim instructors for 1949 were Ray Schaubel, who chaired the Grand Haven branch; Genevieve Robinson of Spring Lake; Lois Jean Smith of West Olive, and Felix Pytlinski of Grand Haven.

The 1940s were about to end, but just ahead loomed another war in the Far East, the beginnings of an Ottawa County population boom, a natural disaster of major proportions, and continued growth of the Ottawa County Red Cross Chapter. With that growth came new challenges and the search for creative responses.

About the author:



Dr. Wallace K. "Wally" Ewing has dedicated more than 20 years to researching and writing about the history of West Michigan. After serving as dean and provost of Colby-Sawyer College in New Hampshire, Ewing returned to Grand Haven in 1994 and devoted himself to research and writing.

“History is Always Alive”

By Eva Dean Folkert



Left to right: Dr. Jeanne Petit, Avery Lowe, Aine O'Connor, Geoffrey Reynolds, and Natalie Fulk

With this year's 100th anniversary of the United States' entry into "the war to end all wars," Hope College faculty and student researchers have delved into the multi-faceted ways Hope and Holland, Michigan, played a part in World War I. What they discovered are timeless tales of patriotism, immigration ideologies and wartime controversy.

Led by History Professor and Department Chair, Dr. Jeanne Petit, and Geoffrey Reynolds, director of the Joint Archives of Holland at Hope College, three history majors—sophomore Aine O'Connor of South Bend, Indiana; junior Avery Lowe of North Muskegon, Michigan; and, senior Natalie Fulk of Mahomet, Illinois—have poured over WWI materials placed in the custody of the archives.

The intensive eight-week project looked at a college and city predominantly populated by Dutch Americans and immigrants, asking ideological questions such as:

How do we understand diversity and patriotism during wartime? What does a global economy mean and how does it work during war? When should patriotism reside next to religion? How are disabled vets rehabilitated and respected at home?

Each query became a not-so-subtle reminder that the more things change, the more they inevitably stay the same — especially when it comes to war.

“You don't learn about World War I history as much as World War II history, so this research was very interesting to me,” said Fulk. “We found so many stories that were unique to this war in Holland and at Hope due to Dutch immigrants or descendants of immigrants in the

area and at this school. Many were asking the question, ‘Am I Dutch or am I American?’ I would say by the end of the war, many Hollanders started thinking of themselves as more American or Dutch-American instead of just Dutch due to a nationwide, patriotic push for national unity on the home front.”

While Fulk researched the naturalization of Dutch and German immigrants in Holland, O'Connor investigated multiple stories of Hope students leaving the college to enlist, serving however and wherever they were sent.

“About 150 men left Hope [during the war] and they went everywhere from Eagle Pass, Texas, to Archangel, Siberia in Russia,” says O'Connor. “When I looked closer at their stories, I found that Hope seemed to write about them the same way they had written about graduates who had become missionaries. They were held up as these bastions of Christianity who were defying the corruption of the military. And, they were doing these incredibly heroic things like saving lives of other soldiers and working in hospitals. The range of what Hope soldiers did was amazing to me — they were chaplains, in the infantry, in the Navy, in the new air service. Men were doing border patrol with Mexico, and one man was in Panama doing scientific work.”

And what was happening back at Hope while these men were away at war? “Women were enrolling in record numbers,” observed O'Connor, “because the war had decimated Hope's enrollment. Women were invited to enroll at the college to boost numbers in the student body as men left campus, or never enrolled, so they could serve in the war.”

Two other stories uncovered by the team illuminated views on veteran disabilities, and the political and religious correctness of displaying the American flag on church pulpits given the Constitutional tenet of separation of church and state. These and more stories about a small town and college's impact on and from the Great War have been published in a web exhibit (<https://sites.google.com/hope.edu/holland-wwi>) to help visitors understand the larger and more specific issues that changed the U.S. and these researchers on multiple levels.

“This is the first time I conducted research,” Lowe explains. As a history major, I find myself being obsessed with things that were going on before I was born and I find myself thinking that 100 years from now, people could potentially be doing research on me, on all of us. I'm fascinated by that thought and perspective because it means history is always alive.”

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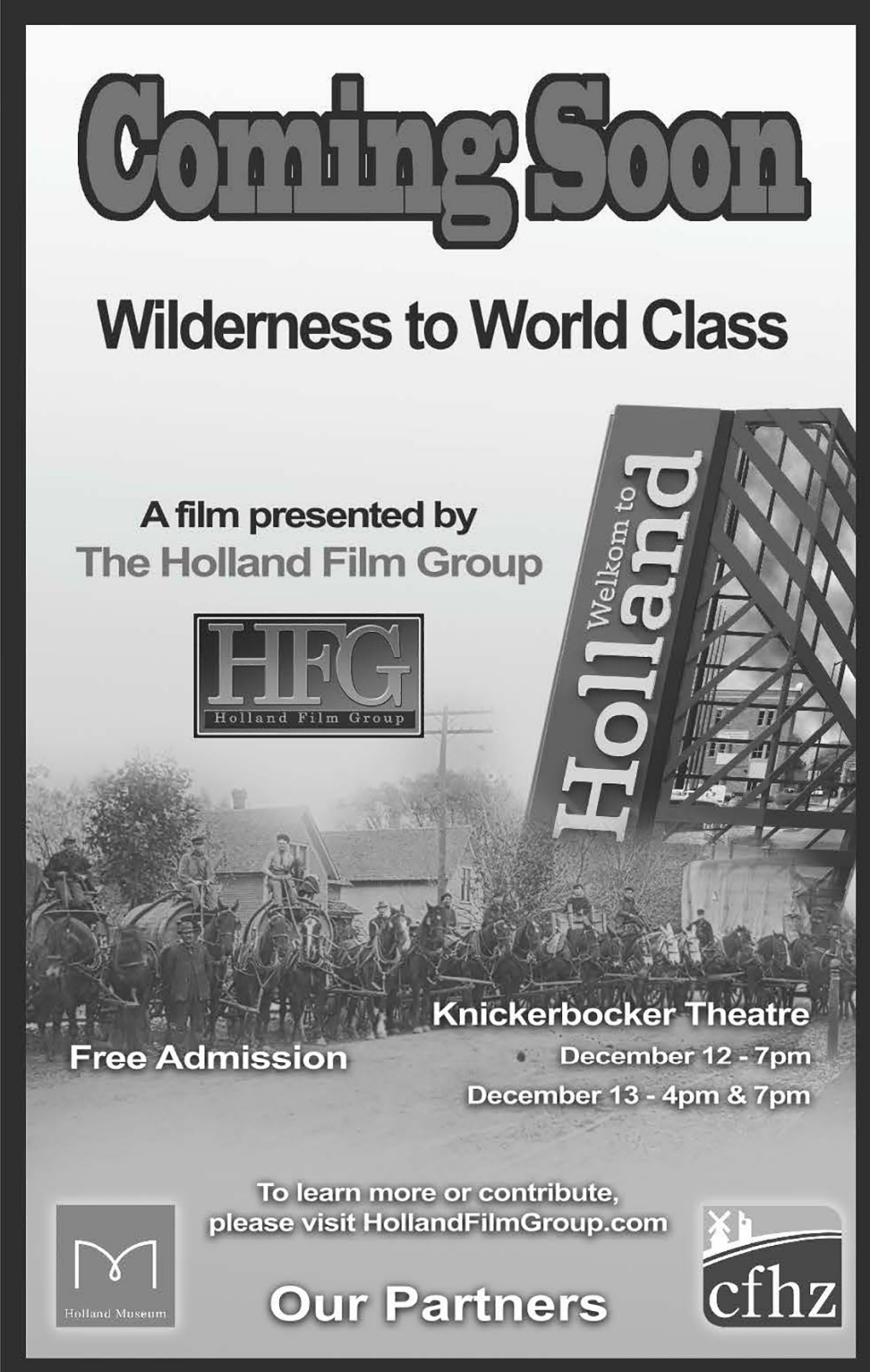
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The showings will be 7 p.m. Dec. 12 and 4 and 7 p.m. Dec. 13 at the Knickerbocker Theater.

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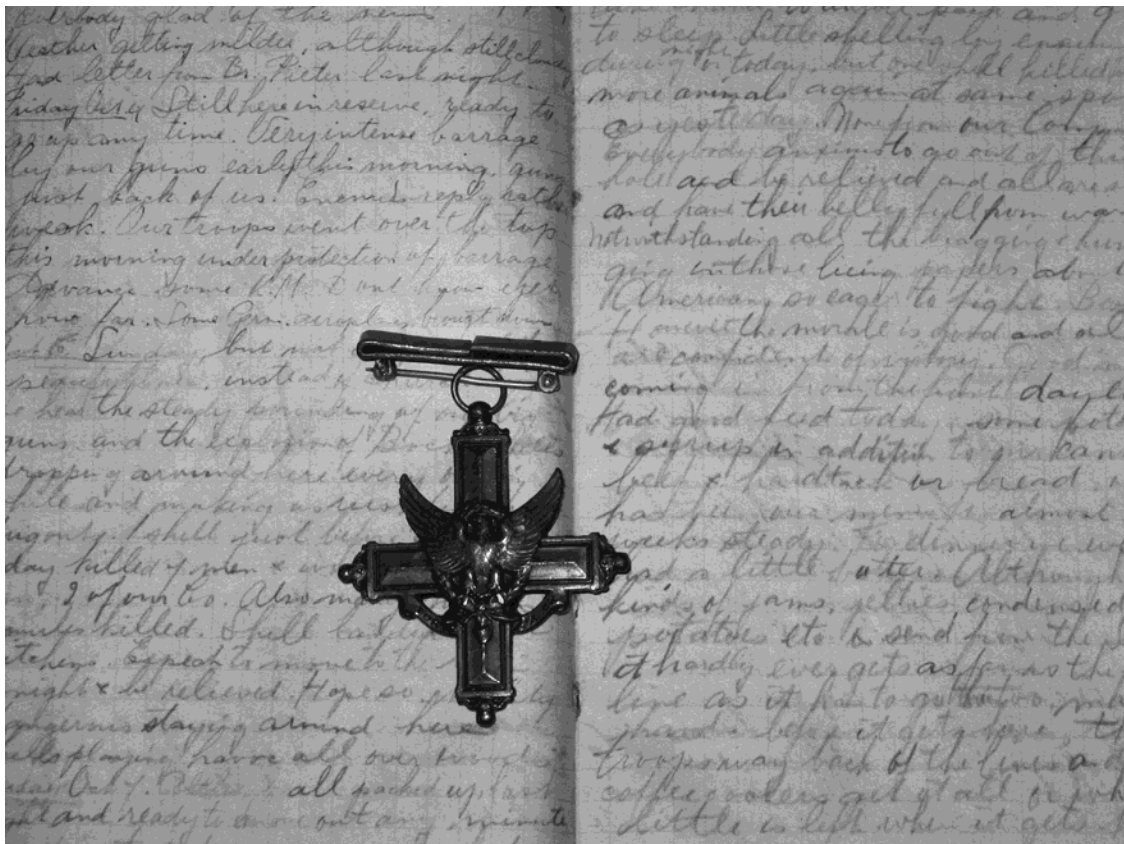
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Go to HollandFilmGroup.com to see a trailer and learn more about the project.



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Pages from diary and Distinguished Service Cross of Thomas Vander Veen, 1918