Photograph album of battlefield scenes of the Passchendaele campaign, in and around Ypres, Belgium during World War I, 1917-1918

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Photograph album of battlefield scenes of the Passchendaele campaign, in and around Ypres, Belgium during World War I

Date (inclusive): 1917-1918

Collection number: 94/252

Physical Description: 1 album (65 photographic prints) : b&w, 23 x 28 cm (album) Photographs (approx. 17 x 22 cm.) are mounted on rectos and versos of heavy white paper; without captions. Bound in red morocco-grain cloth, with red leather corners and spine edged in gilt; gold-stamped spine title "Military photographs."

Spec. Coll. copy: bookseller's ticket on inside front cover of The Antique Bookshop, 66 Victoria Street, McMahons Point. 2060. In modern beige cloth clamshell box, with box title: "World War I Military Photograph Album."

Abstract: Album of photographs, many by Australian official photographer Frank Hurley, documenting one of the major battles of World War I, the Battle of Passchendaele, also known as the Third Battle of Ypres, between July and November 1917.

Language: Finding aid is written in English.

Language of the Material: Materials are in English.

Repository: University of California, Los Angeles. Library Special Collections.

Los Angeles, California 90095-1575

Physical location: Stored off-site at SRLF. Advance notice is required for access to the collection. Please contact UCLA Library Special Collections for paging information.

Restrictions on Access

Open for research. STORED OFF-SITE AT SRLF. Advance notice is required for access to the collection. Please contact UCLA Library Special Collections for paging information.

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Provenance/Source of Acquisition

Purchase, Antique Bookshop & Curios, Peter & Maureen Tinslay, P.O. Box 34, Cremorn, Australia, 1989.

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Photograph album of battlefield scenes of the Passchendaele campaign, in and around Ypres, Belgium during World War I (Collection 94/252). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

UCLA Catalog Record ID

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Biography/History

Frontline photographer during World War I and Arctic adventurer, James Francis "Frank" Hurley was born in Sydney in 1885. As a young man, he taught himself photography, using a Kodak Box Brownie camera which he had bought on instalments for 15 shillings. He spent three years as photographer for Douglas Mawson's Australasian Antarctic expedition (1911-1914), and in 1914, joined the Ernest Shackleton trans-Arctic expedition, where he earned a reputation as a photographer who would do anything for a picture. In 1917, Hurley was sent to the Western Front as an honorary caption in the Australian Imperial Force, and as an official photographer, documented the Passchendaele campaign with some of his most famous images, recorded under such risky and dangerous conditions that he was nicknamed "the mad photographer." Hurley believed that photographs could be manipulated to achieve dramatic and emotional effects, and often clashed with battlefield historians who regarded as "fake" the composite war images he created by combining two or more negatives.

Scope and Content

By attacking the Imperial Germany Army in Passchendaele, and in the area around Ypres, allied troops under British command hoped to cripple the German U-boat campaign by depriving Germany of the use of the Belgian ports. The photographs document the "bite and hold" attacks of allied troops under British command, including Australian units, along the Menen Road (Sept. 20-25), at Polygon Wood (Sept. 26), Zonnebeke and Broodseinde (Oct. 4), Passchendaele (Oct. 12), and Chateau Wood (Oct. 26-Nov. 10). Although the Canadian Corps took Passchendaele on Nov. 6, 1917, the British never really made a decisive breakthrough against the German lines, gaining only five miles of new territory, at a cost of 140,000 lives lost in the combat. The album opens with eight views (several identified through the Australian War Memorial website
as having been taken by Frank Hurley) of the destruction of the town of Ypres, including the ruins of the medieval gothic Cloth Hall, and St. Martin’s Cathedral; only the portico entry to the cathedral cloisters remained standing. There are many photos taken of troop movements and confrontations along the Menen Road, beyond Ypres, towards Passchendaele, where the British plan of attack called for heavy artillery attacks on the German dugouts and concrete “pillboxes.” The area, much of which was reclaimed marshland, received a record amount of rain that summer, resulting in thick mud which disabled the newly-developed tanks, and greatly hampered the soldiers, who often drowned in it, despite the use of “duckboards” or wooden boardwalks placed on top of the mud, visible in some of the photos. The photos record the land devastated by shell craters, the impassable mud, the destroyed artillery carriages, and dead horses along the road, bodies of Australian and German soldiers next to captured pillboxes and dugouts. Denuded tree trunks, stripped of their branches, stand along the Menen Road in Chateau Wood, and Polygon Wood near Hannebeek. A photograph taken Oct. 12, on the day of the first battle of Passchendaele (Aust. War Mem. photo no. E1200), shows the desolation of the muddy battlefield, riddled with deep shell craters full of water. There are five scenes of wounded men being tended to in underground dressing stations, and on stretchers along the road, in Aug. and Sept. 1917. In most of the photos, the medium and heavy artillery being used is evident, as well as newly-developed British tanks, shown in two photos disabled on the battlefield, one bogged down in mud. Another photo records the release of an observation balloon, carrying two men in its basket. Also included are several miscellaneous interior and exterior shots of the ruins of the cathedral of Notre-Dames de Brebières in the town of Albert, France, probably taken by Hurley in Sept. 1917, and the St. Quentin Canal and Bellicourt Tunnel on the Hindenburg Line, dated Sept. 29, 1918 (Aust. War Mem. photo no. E3515). The album concludes with two group photographs of allied commanders, including French, British, and Australian officers.

**Indexing Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library’s online public access catalog.

**Subjects**

St. Martin's Cathedral (Ieper, Belgium) --Photographs.
Lakenhalle (Ieper, Belgium) --Photographs.
Notre-Dame de Brebières (Church : Albert, France) --Photographs.
World War, 1914-1918 --Campaigns --Western Front --Photographs.
World War, 1914-1918 --Campaigns --Belgium --Photographs.
World War, 1914-1918 --Battlefields --Belgium --Photographs.
World War, 1914-1918 --Belgium --Trench warfare --Photographs.
Ieper (Belgium) --History --20th century --Photographs.
Ieper (Belgium) --Buildings, structures, etc. --History --20th century --Photographs.
Passendale (Belgium) --History --20th century --Photographs.
Menen (Belgium) --History --20th century --Photographs.
Albert (France) --History --20th century --Photographs.

**Genres and Forms of Material**

Photographic prints
Photograph albums

**Other Index Terms Related to this Collection**

World War I military photograph album
Military photographs
Hurley, Frank, 1885-1962.

**Related Material**

Part of the Photograph Album Collection (Collection 94). in UCLA Library Special Collections.