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# Plague on the Homefront: Arkansas and the Great Influenza Epidemic of 1918

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HIS YOUTHFUL HEART swelling with patriotic pride, nineteen-year-old Lawrence Brooks Hays rode the night train south from St. Louis. On this hot July evening in 1918, the crowded and stuffy coach did little to dampen the student soldier's enthusiasm. After all, he had just completed a month's military training at Fort Sheridan, Illinois, and to supplement the warm glow he felt for having served with the colors, Hays voluntarily chose to ride coach back to Arkansas in order to save the extra \$3.50 pullman fare for the war effort. He was no "slacker" (the hated term applied to any American in 1918 perceived as not doing his part), even though he had felt a certain uneasy squeamishness performing last month's bayonet practice. He had overcome his revulsion at stabbing the sandbagged dummies and even managed to become adept at the deadly art. Perhaps the extra training would gain him an advanced placement in the Student Army Training Corps in September. By the time he would report for duty at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, Brooks hoped to avoid some of the more odious facets of military life as an officer, allowing him to do his part without undue unpleasantness.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Brooks Hays, *Politics Is My Parish* (Baton Rouge, 1981), 39.

In Austin, Texas, another Arkansas soldier paused a moment to reflect on his own military ambitions. Louis D. "Bud" Lighton, a cadet enrolled at the University of Texas School of Military Aeronautics, faced his approaching graduation from the institution with the exciting prospect of ending up in a cockpit somewhere over France. "There's mighty little chance of anything ever happening," he reassured his mother in a letter home to Fayetteville, "But if, on the off chance such a thing should come, I know you'd rather have me go that way — with my boots on, doing my best to live up to a man's part."<sup>2</sup> Bud looked forward to overcoming the last obstacle between himself and his perceived role: final air training at Park Field just outside Memphis, Tennessee.

When the letter arrived at her home in Pine Bluff near the end of September 1918, Mrs. Henrietta Dodds worried anew about the sacrifices her own family was called on to make. With her eldest son, Edgar, already serving in the army at Camp Pike, she now watched uneasily as her next boy, Homer, ripped open the fateful envelope from Fayetteville. She probably reacted with considerably less enthusiasm than Homer as he joyously announced he had been accepted into the Student Army Training Corps at the University of Arkansas and ordered to report by October 1.<sup>3</sup>

During the last autumn of World War One, thousands of Arkansans like Brooks Hays, Bud Lighton, and Henrietta Dodds were "doing their part" to help defeat the Boche. Young men enlisted in droves, while girls knitted socks and made candy for their heroes. Mothers scrimped on luxuries and coveted the precious coupons that would allow the purchase of sugar, and fathers spent their surplus cash on liberty loan bonds. Schools turned over their facilities for war training, and munitions factories forged the tools for the conflict at a dizzying pace. A time of almost unparalleled patriotism, 1918 Arkansas was no place for a "slacker." So hotly did the jingoistic fever burn that the hamlet of Germantown actually changed its name to Kenwood, while the good ladies of Fayetteville's local liberty loan drive threatened to publish the names of all

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<sup>2</sup>Louis D. Lighton, letters to Laura Lighton, ca. July 1918, Lighton Family Papers (Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville).

<sup>3</sup>Pearl Fears, letter to William Homer Dodds, September 25, 1918, personal collection of Bob Besom, Fayetteville, Arkansas.

prominent businessmen who had yet to purchase war bonds.<sup>4</sup>

Yet for all their efforts, an enemy far more deadly than the Germans was poised to strike at the people of Arkansas that September. In spite of their preparations to meet the threat of a human enemy, those on the homefront would soon learn how woefully inadequate their mobilization had been in the face of a biological foe.

The story of how Arkansas endured the great influenza epidemic of 1918 is the subject of this paper. The human experience of Brooks Hays, Bud Lighton, and the Dodds family will be woven into the tapestry of historical inquiry, and a few observations on the aftereffects of the plague will be offered. What this study will not do is present a complete chronology of the Arkansas epidemic. The limitations of space, the lack of proper records, and the overwhelming difficulty of reconstructing the total picture of an event of such magnitude are just a few variables that prevent a comprehensive study. The effects of the plague lasted well into the year 1919 and smaller epidemics were experienced in Arkansas throughout the 1920s, but in order to limit our examination to a manageable size, research has been restricted to the last four months of 1918, the time when the epidemic was most virulent. Other limitations to our study will be presented below. However, if we have omitted that which other historians would deem crucial to the subject, it is our sincere hope that this paper will point the way to further investigation.

In order to begin a base for future inquiry, we must first lay the foundation of our own study by describing the true villain of the story: the influenza virus. Influenza is a contagious disease usually resulting in inflammation of the upper respiratory tract accompanied by severe muscular and neuralgic pains. "Flu" victims include several species of birds and mammals in addition to man. "Flu" is caused by a particularly hardy and dangerously adaptable virus. The virus can be described as hardy because, unlike AIDS or rabies (also viral diseases), influenza can survive under favorable environmental conditions outside the protective body of the host and is transmitted through the air.<sup>5</sup> Given the ease by

<sup>4</sup> Hays, *Politics Is My Parish*, 38; Fayetteville (Ark.) *Daily Democrat*, October 5, 1918.

<sup>5</sup> Edwin D. Kilbourne, ed., *The Influenza Virus and Influenza* (New York, 1975), 509. Ultraviolet light and relative humidity are two factors which determine the virus's life-span outside the host's body.

which it can spread, the danger of influenza's adaptability is obvious.

The immune system of the human body needs a clear blueprint of any invading pathogen in order to mount a defense, but the influenza virus defies easy recognition due to its genetic composition. It is so tiny that well over a million could clump together on the head of a pin and probably still have room to spare. A small protein envelope studded with spikes called haemagglutinin and neuraminidase (H and N for short) encases the genetic core of the influenza virus comprised of eight separate pieces of ribonucleic acid (RNA). The unusually high number of genes allows the virus a disturbing amount of mutation possibilities when replicating itself.<sup>6</sup>

The proteins of the virus against which a person or animal produces antibodies when he becomes immune are called antigens. The most important antigens of influenza are the H and N spikes, for these provide the "mug shot" that the immune system needs for a positive identification of the invader. When the virus makes a "mistake" in replicating itself, the H and N antigens change, thoroughly confusing the immune system and striking down the host with fever, pain, and discomfort. While influenza itself is rarely fatal, complications caused by other pathogens allowed to flourish in the virus-weakened host can result in death. As one historian has observed of the 1918 outbreak, no other influenza before or since has had such a propensity for fatal pneumonic complications.<sup>7</sup>

The process of reproductive change in the influenza virus has been called antigen shift and drift. William Ian Beveridge in his book on influenza has likened these separate processes of change in the H and N antigens to changes in colors. When the antigens change due to shift, it is as if they have become another color entirely, but a change to drift would be the same as if the color has merely different shading than previously.<sup>8</sup>

Any person infected with an influenza virus develops antibodies to combat that particular virus throughout the person's lifetime. Should

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<sup>6</sup> William Ian Beardmore Beveridge, *Influenza: The Last Great Plague: An Unfinished Story of Discovery* (New York, 1977), 68-70.

<sup>7</sup> Alfred W. Crosby, *Epidemic and Peace, 1918* (Westport, Conn., 1976), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Beveridge, *Last Great Plague*, 71.

the virus return to the person, the recall of his immune system can effectively stave off illness. If a new subtype of virus caused by antigen drift appears, localized epidemics result. When combatting a virus changed by drift, the immune system has a head start in the duel because it has a "memory" from the first infection to help it while developing antibodies against the new virus. When the new subtype of virus appears caused by antigen shift, however, the immune system has a much harder job and the result is a pandemic such as the one which struck the world in 1918.

How new subtypes of influenza virus develop through antigen shift is open to debate. Three popular theories are mutation, adaptation, and hybridization. Mutation is the simplest concept to grasp: the random chance combination of RNA genes followed by their multiplication due to favorable environmental conditions. The adaptation theory holds that a virus previously confined to one species of animal suddenly manages to infect an entirely different species, also probably due to mutation. The hybridization theory states that two different viruses, one from an animal host and one from man, combine to form an entirely different subtype.<sup>9</sup> The adaptation and hybridization theories have particular relevance to the 1918 outbreak, as we shall see shortly.

Influenza has been known to visit man since the dawn of recorded history, but not until the early sixteenth century did the Italians name the malady by attributing it to the "influence" of the stars. In the eighteenth century Frenchmen termed the disease "la grippe" and it has been known at other times as "knock 'em down fever" and other colorful terms, usually a national origin prefixing the noun, such as "Spanish Influenza," the name given to the 1918 disease. The cyclic nature of influenza epidemics has been traced by a number of researchers and the tables they have produced clearly demonstrate the result of antigen shifts in the virus.<sup>10</sup> When a new subtype appears due to shift, no one has immunity and the disease runs rampant through the defenseless population.

All that can definitely be said about the origin of the 1918 influenza epidemic is that at that time a new virus developed, probably due to an antigen shift, for which no one had immunity. Dr. J. S. Koen, an in-

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 80-85.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-30; Kilbourne, *Influenza*, 484.

spector for the division of hog cholera control of the United States Bureau of Animal Industry noticed a correlation between an unusual outbreak of disease in Iowa swine and the human epidemic raging in 1918. His observations netted an understandably cold reception from pig farmers at the time, but it did inspire another researcher, Richard Shope, to investigate further in the late 1920s. Shope managed to isolate the swine influenza virus in 1931, and subsequent studies have shown that people born before 1918 have antibodies against swine influenza. Now bear in mind that, in spite of any evidence to the contrary, pigs are not people, but the evidence does suggest that the swine virus, which is still circulating among America's porkers, is a descendant of the terrible killer of 1918.<sup>11</sup>

The 1918 pandemic was a worldwide catastrophe, killing as many as 22 million people, so it is natural for scientists to labor for an answer. Unfortunately, historian Alfred Crosby has neatly summarized the impossibility of explanation:

We may never discover the secret of the deadliness of Spanish influenza because it was a matter of the balance of two factors, each of which defines the other, i.e., the virus' virulence and the host's vulnerability. The situation that produced Spanish influenza may well be as lost as yesterday's wave in the ocean.<sup>12</sup>

All of the preceding observations on influenza are based on research conducted after 1918 and, as such, give no clue as to the contemporary physician's understanding of the malady. Medical technology had come a long way by the time of the First World War. Remedies, treatments, or vaccinations against the spread of smallpox, typhoid, malaria, yellow fever, cholera, and diphtheria had all been devised by 1918,<sup>13</sup> and doctors could take justifiable pride in the accomplishments of their profession. The concept of asepsis and the germ theory of disease were widely accepted, and physicians were convinced most biological pathogens could be isolated, cultivated in the laboratory, and vaccines developed from the culture. In the late nineteenth century a few researchers speculated that

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<sup>11</sup> Beveridge, *Last Great Plague*, 78.

<sup>12</sup> Crosby, *Epidemic*, 306.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

some pathogens were much too small to see even with the aid of the most powerful microscope and could not be stopped by a filter designed to catch known forms of bacteria. They named these invisible trouble-makers "viruses," but not everyone believed the theory, especially as it applied to influenza, because one scientist with an impressive reputation believed he had already found the cause of the disease.

German microbiologist Richard Pfeiffer studied an influenza epidemic which struck Europe and America in 1889-1890. Pfeiffer managed to isolate a bacilli from the sputum of flu victims which he became convinced caused the malady. The pathogen was named "Pfeiffer's Influenza Bacillus" in honor of its discoverer and became the object of much study and research. By the time of the 1918 outbreak, *b. influenzae* would become the fixation of desperate researchers in Arkansas and around the world.

In order to describe Arkansas's experience during the 1918 epidemic, the historian faces several problems. Numbers count in history, and statistics are the yardstick by which historians measure the effects of any phenomenon of the past. However, as other writers have pointed out, accurate figures on the epidemic are restricted to three classifications of Americans in 1918: soldiers, sailors, and civilians in large urban areas.<sup>14</sup> Obviously the records kept by the United States Navy are of little use for Arkansas. When we turn our attention to the large cities of the state in 1918 we find only two, Little Rock and Fort Smith, with a population over 30,000.<sup>15</sup> Overwhelmingly rural, 1918 Arkansas had over 80 percent of its citizens still on the farm.<sup>16</sup> Country people are certainly as susceptible to contagious disease as their urban cousins and, indeed, the isolation enjoyed by back country dwellers makes them an ideal target for infection since it limits their opportunities to develop antibodies. But the same isolation also makes accurate record keeping of rural people an almost impossible task.

It is with soldiers like Brooks Hays, Bud Lighton, and Homer Dodds

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>15</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Financial Statistics of Cities Having a Population Over 30,000, 1918* (Washington, D. C., 1919), 119.

<sup>16</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census, *14th Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920: Population, 1920, Number and Distribution of Inhabitants*, Vol. 1 (Washington, D. C., 1921), 55.

that one finds the most accurate figures to measure the impact of the epidemic. Camp Albert Pike, a sprawling cantonment established by the United States Army for training recruits north of Little Rock, formed the nucleus of Arkansas's war effort in 1918, and thanks to the tireless efforts of the military bureaucracy, contemporary researchers have a fair amount of data dealing with the epidemic at that location. In view of the wealth of material on Camp Pike, this study will necessarily center on the camp's experiences.

Another obstacle to be reckoned with in discussing the Arkansas experience during the plague is the dearth of manuscript documents for research. The several archives of the state contain numerous collections pertaining to Arkansas physicians, but almost none covers the fall of 1918.<sup>17</sup> Of course, many of the state's doctors and nurses were then serving with the military and, true to the time-honored traditions of military efficiency, these professionals were sent to installations in other states while those from other locations were transferred to Arkansas. The possibility exists that the best manuscript documents from military doctors serving in Arkansas during the First World War are all located in other states's archives. What few records of 1918 Arkansas doctors are available are of little help in understanding their role during the epidemic. Part of the blame lies in their bookkeeping techniques, for instead of keeping a day by day cash journal, physicians usually recorded their patients in ledgers, listing charges by name rather than by chronological order. The ledgers can tell the researcher a great deal about any given individual's medical history, but reconstructing the physician's activities during a set period of time is next to impossible.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps even if they were available, daily cash journals would not yield much information since the number of patients treated by an overworked doctor during the epidemic would preclude any leisure to record daily visitations.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>George D. Counts, M.D., Papers (Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville); S. L. Hollabaugh, M.D., Papers (History of Medicine Associates Archives, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Library, Little Rock, Arkansas).

<sup>18</sup>Counts Papers, Hollabaugh Papers. Both of these collections contain doctors' ledgers covering the fall of 1918, and a brief review has revealed no sudden explosion of cases during that time period.

<sup>19</sup>Little Rock *Arkansas Gazette*, November 28, 1918. "Batesville—The doctors of this city have made a public appeal to their patrons for remittance since the recent epidemic of

To speak with the medical professionals of 1918 themselves would be an ideal answer to the problem presented by the lack of written records, but we have all but passed the time when such an opportunity exists. Today, a person would have to be at least ninety years old to have been practicing medicine in 1918. Needless to say, the memory of such a person is highly unlikely to include any specifics of an event which occurred almost seventy years ago. At the outset of this project, we attempted to contact any medical professionals who may have been practicing in 1918 Arkansas. The few responses that were gathered have been incorporated into this paper, but they shed a very dim light for our purposes.

The largest obstacle in the study of Arkansas's 1918 epidemic is our collective amnesia on the subject. In a quote he credits H. L. Mencken, historian Richard Collier aptly describes the forgetfulness of the plague's victims:

The epidemic is seldom mentioned, and most Americans have apparently forgotten it. This is not surprising. The human mind always tries to expunge the intolerable from memory, just as it tries to conceal it while current.<sup>20</sup>

The epidemic struck with such violence, and disappeared so shortly, that it left little enough to remember it by. Its impact on the economy was temporary, and, unlike returning soldiers with pinned up sleeves or trouser legs, survivors of influenza bore no life-long scars to remind us of the horror they endured.

Another peculiarity of the epidemic contributes to its obscurity. Unlike other epidemics, the 1918 influenza killed young adults in numbers as great, or greater, than infants and the elderly.<sup>21</sup> When illness

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influenza, as the urgent and numerous calls made it almost impossible to book all accounts at the time the calls were made."

<sup>20</sup> Richard Collier, *The Plague of the Spanish Lady: The Influenza Epidemic of 1918-1919* (New York, 1974), 304.

<sup>21</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Special Tables of Mortality from Influenza and Pneumonia in Indiana, Kansas, and Philadelphia, Pa.: September 1 to December 31, 1918* (Washington, D. C., 1920), 8. "The tremendous toll exacted of adults between 20 and 40 is evident from the fact that 14,153 of the 26,926 deaths here tabulated . . . occurred in this 20 year period, or, in other words, 52% of the male deaths and 52% of the female deaths, although the population between 20 and 40 years in Indiana, Kansas, and Philadelphia is only 33%." Since Arkansas was not among the areas for which the census pro-

strikes down statesmen, community leaders, and others in positions of influence, its impact is far more readily apparent than the loss of those just at the threshold of their careers. The influenza epidemic of 1918 took its heaviest toll on those members of society who had yet to make a lasting contribution.

Of course, preoccupation with the war held most Arkansans spellbound in 1918. With newspaper reports describing American victories in France, peace rumors, and Liberty Loan drives, it is understandable that the epidemic would take a back seat. A Rogers, Arkansas, journalist, Erwin Funk, accurately described the country's mood while on a trip to Chicago in October 1918. After relating how difficult it would be to gauge the impact of the flu in such a large city, Funk added: "Chicago isn't doing any statistical gathering on the subject just now, at least for publication. Chicago isn't interested in the flu anyhow. Chicago is interested in the war."<sup>22</sup> The same could be said about the citizens of Little Rock, Fort Smith, or a dozen other Arkansas cities in the fall of 1918. The impending conclusion of the most catastrophic war yet endured by man proved to be an all-consuming topic for most people at the time, regardless of conditions closer to home.

Another item of interest to the Arkansas press during the fall of 1918 was the impending vote on a proposed new constitution for the state. With issues to worry over such as woman suffrage and prohibition, it is understandable how the average reader could overlook a reassuring article in the September 20 issue of the Little Rock *Arkansas Gazette* which headlined "Spanish Influenza is plain la grippe — same old fever and chills feature disease reported in Little Rock." In spite of the ominous reports coming from concerned health officials in Massachusetts, where the deadly disease first appeared on September 7, Doctor James C. Geiger, the United States Public Health Service officer for Arkansas, pronounced the malady "simple, plain old-fashioned la grippe." It is hard to understand Geiger's simple dismissal when one considers the death rate in Boston alone during the first two weeks of the epidemic

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duced an in-depth study, I have generalized by using data from Kansas, the closest state receiving such careful study by statisticians.

<sup>22</sup>Erwin Charles Funk, newspaper clipping, scrapbook no. 1, Erwin Charles Funk Papers (Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville).

stood at 265 people.<sup>23</sup>

Another health agency should have taken note of the dire events back East. The Arkansas State Board of Health, organized in 1913, had been charged by the legislature with the awesome responsibility of safeguarding the public health. The board, operating under the capable direction of state physician Charles Willis Garrison, managed to implement an impressive set of regulations governing the processing of food, sanitation of public facilities, and control of communicable diseases.<sup>24</sup> Although influenza was not among the twenty maladies listed by the board as being subject to reporting and quarantine by Arkansas doctors, a proviso had been added to cover attacks from unforeseen pathogens: "Other communicable diseases not named in this list may at any time be declared notifiable as the necessity and public health demand, and regulations for their control shall apply when so ordered by the state Board of Health."<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, by the time influenza was declared a reportable disease, the epidemic was well under way. The state board concerned itself with other matters than the influenza epidemic or possible quarantine regulations during the latter half of September. Dr. Garrison's officers appear to have been mostly concerned with enforcing the new typhoid inoculation requirements for Arkansas schoolchildren in preparation for the fall term. That his agency did not inspire confidence in all citizens is evidenced by reports of Madison County school officials refusing to comply with regulations regarding the hated shots.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps the lack of cooperation experienced by the board in implementing the typhoid regulations could have been seen as an indication of how much compliance they could expect when faced by a greater menace.

At least one arm of the government, the military, had no problems enforcing health regulations among its charges. When Brooks Hays and Homer Dodds arrived in Fayetteville the last day of September, they found the University of Arkansas transformed into a military enclave.

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<sup>23</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, September 20, 1918; Crosby, *Epidemic*, 60.

<sup>24</sup> Vinnie A. Garrison, *A History of Public Health Service in Arkansas* (Little Rock, 1949), 1-8.

<sup>25</sup> *Revised Bulletin of the Rules and Regulations of the State Board of Health of Arkansas* (Little Rock, 1918), 6.

<sup>26</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, September 22, 1918.

Surrounding the YMCA hut just west of the Arkansas Avenue-Dickson Street intersection in the southeast corner of the campus, a small city of frame barracks had sprung up to house the newly formed Student Army Training Corps (SATC). Uniformed guards positioned at the campus main gate barred anyone from entering unless they held a pass signed by Major George Martin, the university commandant who shared administrative powers with president John C. Futrall. Brooks and Homer, along with 600 other student soldiers, lined up for their registration, physical examination, and bunk assignments, and then were promptly placed under a two-week quarantine. The enforced isolation may not have necessarily been for influenza specifically, but rather a routine requirement for enlistees in all United States military installations, and during its course the young soldiers would have to endure a series of unpleasant hypodermic injections to guard against any number of maladies. Brooks, now cashing in on his previous stint with the army, cheerfully assisted inducting his comrades and hurriedly wrote to his parents for his own inoculation certificate.<sup>27</sup> He then settled down with stoic indifference to endure his imprisonment and the constant cajoling of officers to cover every sneeze and cough. Brooks's quiet sacrifice, along with the whole reason behind it, were incomprehensible to his girlfriend, Marion Prather, then making preparations to come up to Fayetteville herself. "If you're in quarantine, can't you meet the train?" she complained in a letter, "I don't want you to be in quarantine!"<sup>28</sup> Perhaps Brooks didn't want to be in quarantine either, but he would not have to wait long to find a way out of the barracks. Within two days many of his comrades packed into the cramped quarters were leaving: straight to the infirmary with severe cases of influenza.

Although he did not mention it in his letters, Bud Lighton also may have sat through a quarantine when he transferred to the new post at Memphis. Actual hands on flying experience would form the bulk of his training at Park Field, and the early morning sessions with his genial instructor quickly became a pleasant routine. When the morning came that his instructor received his overseas orders, Bud gave the matter little

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<sup>27</sup> Lawrence Brooks Hays, letter to Sallie Butler Hays, September 30, 1918, Lawrence Brooks Hays Papers (Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville).

<sup>28</sup> Marion Prather, letter to Lawrence Brooks Hays, October 3, 1918, Hays Papers.

concern. He would have at least a few more days training before the officer had to leave. Unfortunately, events robbed the young air cadet of even this brief additional training, for Bud's instructor, like hundreds of other soldiers stationed at Park Field, reported to the infirmary with fever, aches, and a chest-splitting cough. Bud didn't even enjoy the luxury of visiting his mentor before he, too, took his place among the afflicted.<sup>29</sup>

Arkansas civilian health authorities made pitifully few preparations even as the epidemic gained momentum. Part of the reason Arkansas calmly awaited the virological attack can be found in the reassuring statements Dr. Geiger and others made to the press from Little Rock. As researchers have noted about other localities, Arkansas health officials pursued an ill-advised attempt to stem panic by playing the epidemic down.<sup>30</sup> "Situation still well in hand," Geiger cheerfully told the *Gazette* on October 4, even though the combined cities of Little Rock and North Little Rock reported 506 cases of influenza. On the next day, after reports indicated an additional 296 cases, the soothing health official stated, "The disease has reached its highest point here and the number of cases will begin to decline from now on."<sup>31</sup> Even Dr. Garrison of the State Board of Health still asked for voluntary isolation of "flu" victims while doctors were reporting the disease in Newport, Wilmot, Hot Springs, Stuttgart, Waldron, Subiaco, Paris, Hunter, and Dermott. "A general quarantine is both unwise and unnecessary," concurred Dr. Geiger. "Were such drastic measures necessary, the [United States] Public Health Service, which has the interests of the people always in mind, would have declared a quarantine before now."<sup>32</sup> Two days later, after 1,800 cases were reported, the Arkansas Board of Health did just that by declaring a quarantine over the entire state.<sup>33</sup>

When the first soldier victim reported to Camp Pike's base hospital on September 23, the administrator, Major Morton R. Gibbons, had every reason to become hysterically concerned. Reports from the War

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<sup>29</sup> Louis D. Lighton, letter to Laura Lighton, ca. October 1918, Lighton Papers.

<sup>30</sup> Collier, *Plague of the Spanish Lady*, 153.

<sup>31</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, October 5, 1918.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, October 6, 1918.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, October 8, 1918.

Department indicated over 20,000 soldiers in camps all over the United States had fallen ill with influenza,<sup>34</sup> and with so many transfers of personnel from camp to camp, a serious outbreak in Arkansas was unavoidable. Hardly comforting was the fact that a special commission of military doctors had been transferred to Camp Pike on September 5 to investigate the post's pneumonia prevalence. Even though the researchers, headed by Major Eugene Opie, arrived in Arkansas two days before the influenza outbreak even appeared in North America, the War Department recognized Camp Pike as having one of the highest death rates from pneumonia of any American military camp.<sup>35</sup> The presence of the visiting commission proved to be an omen for Edgar Dodds and 756 others who fell victim to influenza on September 28.<sup>36</sup> By that time Colonel Charles Miller, the commander of the base, had declared a quarantine for most of the individual units in the camp in a desperate attempt to control the outbreak. In spite of their best efforts, Camp Pike's medical officers faced over 7,600 influenza patients before the month of September ended.<sup>37</sup> Edgar Dodds found himself in the fortunate majority who recovered, but another luckless 100 or so were wheeled into the autopsy room for Major Opie's team to examine.<sup>38</sup>

Even if Henrietta Dodds knew about Edgar's sickness, she probably wouldn't have been able to visit her son anyway. Visitors were being discouraged at Camp Pike as early as September 28 for all but the most grave emergencies, and from all indications, Edgar's plight was not life threatening. Like other Arkansas civilians who may have kept abreast of the situation at the post, Henrietta instead awaited the inevitable arrival of the plague at her own doorstep.<sup>39</sup> Already at Carlisle, a small town east

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, September 24, 1918.

<sup>35</sup> Eugene L. Opie *et al.*, *Epidemic Respiratory Disease* (St. Louis, 1921), 15.

<sup>36</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, September 28, 1918; Henrietta Dodds, letter to Homer Dodds, October 10, 1918, Besom Collection.

<sup>37</sup> Office of the Surgeon General, *The Medical Department of the United States Army in the World War*, Vol. 15, pt. 2, *Medical and Casualty Statistics* (Washington, D. C., 1921-1929), 973, 989, 1002-1003, 1012.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 989, 1012; Edgar Dodds, letter to Henrietta Dodds, October 27, 1918, Besom Collection.

<sup>39</sup> Henrietta Dodds, letter to Homer Dodds, October 10, 1918. Besom Collection. Henrietta is almost fatalistic as she declares, "We are all expecting the 'flu' just any day."

of Little Rock and near another military installation, Ebbert's Field, influenza had appeared with frightening suddenness.<sup>40</sup> As the month of October began, the first soldier at Ebbert's Field to die since the camp's establishment succumbed to influenza, and sixty cases were reported in the city of Little Rock. Henrietta would find quite chilling Dr. Geiger's statement to the press, "It is doubtful that there are any effective preventive measures which may be used by the patients themselves."<sup>41</sup> With the awareness that the malady was on its way, it is possible Henrietta realized as fact what a future historian would say of the epidemic: "Spanish influenza moved across the United States in the same way as the pioneers had, for it followed their trails, which had become railroads, and propagated fastest in those localities most attractive to them — the confluences of rivers and trails, the easiest mountain passes, and the shortest portages, where they and their descendants had built their cities."<sup>42</sup> It would only be a matter of time before the juggernaut steam-rolled into every corner of the state. If Henrietta turned her thoughts to Homer's condition at the University of Arkansas, she had the dubious reassurance of an October 2 news release from Fayetteville confidently reporting that every "cold" was being isolated and, as yet, no cases of "flu" had been found. The release became inaccurate almost as soon as it was issued.<sup>43</sup>

Within two days, Dr. Nina "Ma" Hardin had her work cut out for her. The respected and beloved doctor who acted as superintendent of the University of Arkansas infirmary found her limited facilities crowded to capacity with sick soldiers, among whom was Brooks Hays, basking in the attention of the kindly physician. Brooks's early contraction of the disease had earned him a ticket out of the barracks, but most of the young men remained behind imprisoned with their sick comrades when room in the infirmary ran out. Brook's mother, understandably frantic with worry, called Hardin every twelve hours to check on her

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See also: Charles E. Crawford, letter to Victor Primrose, October 23, 1918, Mooney-Barker-Martin Collection (Shiloh Museum, Springdale, Arkansas). Crawford's letter also captures the mood of waiting for the arrival of the disease.

<sup>40</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, September 28, 1918.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, October 1, 1918.

<sup>42</sup> Crosby, *Epidemic*, 63.

<sup>43</sup> *Fayetteville Daily Democrat*, October 2, 1918.

son,<sup>44</sup> while Miss Belle Blanchard, a Red Cross nurse on the Fayetteville campus, had to appeal to the public for even the most basic comforts for the suffering lads still convalescing in the barracks. Here supplications to the townfolk for pillows and bedsheets were followed up with a more demanding request as the situation worsened. Fifty women, with or without formal medical training, were needed to help nurse the sick around the clock.<sup>45</sup> Among those heroic females who responded to Blanchard's call was Mrs. Laura Lighton, who probably saw Bud's face in every fevered brow she soothed in the SATC barracks. She hadn't heard from Bud in a few days, and went about her business blissfully ignorant of the fact that he, too, had fallen ill. It probably wouldn't have mattered if she knew, anyway, for, like Bud, Laura simply wanted to "do her part" regardless of the personal risk.<sup>46</sup>

How well the average Arkansan understood the risk is open to interpretation. When her husband staggered home sick from the Louisiana oil fields, Bodcaw housewife Lois Mays clearly remembers him ordering her to keep the children away, and most of the published instructions from health officials stressed this need for isolation of victims.<sup>47</sup> Other advice proved to be false, and occasionally dangerous. "There is no immunization to the disease," Dr. Geiger emphatically announced. "It may be taken again immediately upon recovery from a severe attack."<sup>48</sup> "An atomizer filled with Listerine . . . used in both nose and throat, night and morning, should prevent infection," advised Dr. John S. Izard in a letter approved by the United States Public Health Service.<sup>49</sup> The use of such physical barriers gained credence when the Little Rock chapter of the American Red Cross announced it would devote its entire attention to the manufacture of gauze "flu" masks, and even Henrietta

<sup>44</sup> Sallie Butler Hays, letter to Lawrence Brooks Hays, October 6, 1918, Hays Papers.

<sup>45</sup> Fayetteville *Daily Democrat*, October 5 and 6, 1918.

<sup>46</sup> Louis D. Lighton, letter to Laura Lighton, ca. October, 1918, Lighton Papers. In this letter, Bud admitted concealing his illness from his parents while his mother responded to the call for volunteers at Fayetteville. Her motivation, therefore, was not based on a knowledge of Bud's affliction.

<sup>47</sup> Lois Mack Mays, personal interview at Hope, Arkansas, October 23, 1987; *Arkansas Gazette*, October 3, 1918.

<sup>48</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, October 1, 1918.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, October 6, 1918.

Dodds found comfort in the idea of a talisman to ward off sickness as she tied bags of asafoetida around the necks of her children.<sup>50</sup>

Patent medicine advertisers pulled out all the stops during this golden opportunity for profits. Unlike press releases from bonafide health officials, some advertisers did not hesitate to claim their product would prevent influenza. "Microzone constitutes an absolute antidote to infections and contagious diseases," boasted one Hot Springs manufacturer.<sup>51</sup> "Prevent Spanish influenza and other dangerous colds, catarrh, etc.," promised the makers of Dr. Jones Catarrhal Oil.<sup>52</sup> In a gem of analogous reasoning, the producers of Laxative Bromo-Quinine tablets advised larger doses of their product because "Spanish influenza is an exaggerated form of grip . . . a good plan is not to wait until you are sick."<sup>53</sup>

But what could doctors actually advise their patients to do in the face of such an unstoppable onslaught? Aside from elaborating on Geiger's grim little ditty, "Cover up each cough and sneeze; If you don't, you'll spread disease," physicians had few weapons in their arsenal with which to treat influenza patients. Since the prolonged fever and muscular pains resembled severe attacks of malaria, some medicos, like George S. Brown of Conway, believed "the daily dose of quinine . . . is a prophylactic and curative agent."<sup>54</sup> So many doctors added calomel to quinine in their prescriptions that the combination was dubbed "that good old Arkansas style."<sup>55</sup> Treatments for pneumonic complications included digitalis with sodium bicarbonate, along with more complicated operations such as drainage of empyema by removing a section of rib and inserting a tube into the chest cavity.<sup>56</sup> One can only speculate on the motives of an

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*; Henrietta Dodds, letter to Homer Dodds, October 13, 1918, Besom Collection.

<sup>51</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, October 23, 1918.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, October 22, 1918.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, October 11, 1918.

<sup>54</sup> George S. Brown, "Clinical Lessons from 343 cases of Influenza and 49 cases of Pneumonia," *Journal of the Arkansas Medical Association*, XVI (October 1919), 100.

<sup>55</sup> T. J. Wood, "Discussion," *Journal of the Arkansas Medical Association*, XVI (October 1919), 107; Lois Mack Mays, personal interview at Hope, Arkansas, October 23, 1987; O. T. Bush, "The Flu Epidemic of 1918-1919," *Faulkner Facts and Fiddlings*, XXVIII (Fall/Winter 1986), 1.

<sup>56</sup> Washington County Medical Society Records (Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville), manuscript vol. 2, 150; Gordon H. McNeil, personal interview at Fayetteville, Arkansas, September 25, 1987; Brown, "Clinical Lessons," 101.

unidentified Pine Bluff practitioner who assured the public that a "sure cure" for influenza could be obtained by drinking a teaspoon of soda mixed with water every half hour until seven doses were taken. Perhaps even the editor of the Pine Bluff *Graphic* recognized the advice as a placebo treatment as he advised anyone suffering "could at least give the prescription a try."<sup>57</sup>

Although it was practically useless, some Arkansas doctors experienced positive results by using influenza "vaccine." As we have seen, influenza was believed to be caused by a bacillus in 1918 and vaccine produced from the cultured growth of the microbes had been available to Arkansas doctors for years. In 1917, Searcy physician John L. Jones informed his colleagues they could not do better than to give the serum to their influenza patients.<sup>58</sup> Failure of the vaccine in many cases did not disturb the belief of *b. influenzae* as cause of the malady because many explained the serum's ineffectiveness to be a result of inaccurate diagnosis.

The best example of such unshakable faith in Pfeiffer's bacillus can be found at Camp Pike. Major Eugenc Opic's team stood in the vanguard of the true believers, and as men fell sick by the thousands all about them, the researchers attempted to identify and isolate the deadly cause. As early as September 28, the doctors were begging the citizens of Little Rock for white mice on which to experiment, and on October 11, a special laboratory railroad car, the "Lister," was assigned to the team.<sup>59</sup> The researchers already felt as if they knew the culprit responsible for the plague, and as a result, they spent most of their time in a fruitless effort to verify the hypothesis. Because Opic's team reasoned that uncomplicated influenza was not fatal, and that samples taken from cadavers were necessarily polluted by secondary infections which brought on pneumonia, they concentrated on sampling men who had just contracted influenza. On October 10 the researchers took samples from twenty-three consecutive cases of influenza, one from the nose, throat, and sputum of each soldier, as well as a fourth sample derived after injecting the sputum into one of the hapless white mice of Little Rock.<sup>60</sup> By totalling the re-

<sup>57</sup> Pine Bluff (Ark.) *Graphic*, October 10, 1918.

<sup>58</sup> J. L. Jones, "Post-Gripal Otitis Media," *Journal of the Arkansas Medical Association*, XIV (October 1917), 102.

<sup>59</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, September 28, 1918; Opic, *Respiratory Disease*, 16.

<sup>60</sup> Opic, *Respiratory Disease*, 30.

sults obtained by each of the four different samples, the Camp Pike doctors were able to find traces of *b. influenzae* in every one of the twenty-three men examined, but no single type of sample yielded consistent results. Even the erratic findings of other scientists around the world were dismissed because of the “unfamiliarity of those who have failed to find [*b. influenzae*] with the proper bacteriologic methods.”<sup>61</sup> After carefully tabulating the results from their tests, the team published an authoritative study in 1920 entitled *Epidemic Respiratory Disease* which concluded that “the constant association of *b. influenzae* with influenza suggests that it is the cause.”<sup>62</sup> Dr. Thomas Rivers, one of the authors who went on to enjoy a distinguished career in medical research, regretted his participation in the study during an interview in 1967 by admitting, “Well, we were just 100 percent wrong.”<sup>63</sup>

Right or wrong, the doctors carried on their research in the midst of what can only be described as bedlam. During the opening days of October, men fell ill at Camp Pike at the rate of 1,000 per twenty-four hours. At first the commanding officer tried an individual unit quarantine, but on October 3, Colonel Miller declared the entire camp under quarantine by cancelling all public gatherings at the camp’s theatre, YMCA hut, and other places of amusement.<sup>64</sup> In a curious reflection of the military caste system, however, officers were still allowed to leave Camp Pike with certain restrictions, while enlisted men found themselves confined to quarters. By October 9, Colonel Miller was forced to recognize that the virus made no distinction between a private’s stripes and a major’s oak leaves when he included officers in the ban. By then even civilians were prohibited from entering and the camp gates were sealed tight, leaving a teeming metropolis of over 52,000 men to endure the plague until it exhausted itself.

Camp Pike became an island that seemed as isolated as Antarctica to many of the soldiers imprisoned there. So many fell ill that room in the hospitals became exhausted and sick doughboys were cordoned off inside barracks they shared with those who were well. A more effective method

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 370.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas Rivers, *Reflections on a Life in Medicine and Research* (Cambridge, 1967), 59.

<sup>64</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, October 3, 1918.

of insuring the spread of the disease could hardly be imagined as the bored troopers listlessly idled in their bunks, fighting over available reading material and waiting for it all to be over. Corporal Henry Loesch recalled the soldiers' rough humor, not unlike that expressed by men in combat to relieve tension, that his comrades indulged in during their confinement with the sick. An ailing trooper restricted to the upper floor of Loesch's barracks staggered downstairs one morning to gravely inquire about the night's death toll, but met, instead of sympathy, the jeering comments of the unafflicted telling him that he had "missed the draft." The soldier recovered to join in the laughter a few days later.<sup>65</sup>

With new recruits arriving daily at Camp Pike, the quarantine became no more than a paper barrier to the plague, and crowding in the barracks fueled the epidemic accordingly. Edgar Dodds spent little more than a day in the hospital before woozily returning to his barracks, only to find his pallet moved to a tent outside to alleviate the tightly packed building. The warm weather made the change nothing more than a minor inconvenience to Edgar, but the fresh air he gained probably saved the young recruit's life by staving off pneumonia during his recovery.<sup>66</sup> His morale, along with many of his comrades, got an unexpected boost when a surplus of ice cream was distributed on October 6. To many soldiers like Edgar, the frozen delicacy was just the ticket for a queasy stomach, and a near riot resulted at the Hostess House on October 9 when the staff desperately tried to rid themselves of ice cream after receiving the quarantine closing order by offering triple dipped cones for a nickel.<sup>67</sup> But still, the camp seemed a lonesome, stifled compound for those in residence, and ironically, at the same moment the soldiers consoled themselves with vanilla and chocolate treats, Camp Pike's morale officer, Lieutenant T. C. Defries, lay dying with pneumonia. It is entirely possible that Defries gave up the ghost while listening to strains of music drifting into the hospital from the bands he had authorized to tour the camp, the "Kill the Flu Quartet" and the "Flu Chaser Jazz Band."<sup>68</sup>

In the city of Little Rock, conditions continued to deteriorate. The

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, December 15, 1918.

<sup>66</sup> Edgar Dodds, letter to Henrietta Dodds, October 6, 1918, Besom Collection.

<sup>67</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, October 9, 1918.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, October 17, 1918.

quarantine regulations forced not only the closing of schools, churches, theatres, and lodges, but also shortened the operating hours of retail shops and prohibited bargain sales to discourage crowds. At first the quarantine seemed no more than a minor inconvenience to many citizens. After noting the absence of any parties or receptions to relate, an exasperated society columnist at the *Arkansas Gazette* complained that the sole remaining amusements for the gentry class consisted of reading and playing solitaire.<sup>69</sup> Southwestern Bell officials announced their work force had been reduced by 65 percent, severely affecting service to customers like Sallie Butler Hays, who expressed her concern to Brooks over having to wait for a few days for a telephone in their new house.<sup>70</sup> To children the quarantine represented both freedom and opportunity. Homer Dodd's little brother Robert picked up some extra cash patching roofs during the forced school closing, and James Carr Cobb of Jonesboro looked forward to a long winter vacation playing in the snow before he developed a case of influenza himself.<sup>71</sup>

Soon enough the gravity of the situation manifested itself as the number of "flu" victims increased. Rumors abounded regarding the seriousness of the situation, but the reactions of civilian and military authorities to stifle the gossip took strangely divergent paths. On October 11 the United States Public Health Service announced that it would publish a daily official record of reported influenza cases in Little Rock along with a tally of the dead since the beginning of the month.<sup>72</sup> Dr. Geiger apparently reckoned that such an accurate source of information would squash rumors and help civilian morale, but Colonel Charles Miller took a totally opposite view. After days of depressing obituary notices listing Camp Pike soldiers, the commandant instructed Owens and Company, undertakers in North Little Rock, to withhold all such information from the newspapers beginning October 13.<sup>73</sup> (The mortician was in no

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, October 13, 1918.

<sup>70</sup> Sallie Butler Hays, letter to Brooks Hays, October 16, 1918, Hays Papers; *Arkansas Gazette*, October 12, 1918.

<sup>71</sup> Henrietta Dodds, letter to Homer Dodds, October 13, 1918, Besom Collection; James Carr Cobb, "Growing Up in Jonesboro," *Craighead County Historical Quarterly*, XXV (October 1987), 12.

<sup>72</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, October 11, 1918.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, October 13, 1918.

position to refuse the order: his firm held the contract for the post and had been assigned nine government embalmers just to keep up with the rush.)<sup>74</sup>

Even though their policy of reporting differed completely, both Camp Pike and the city of Little Rock have left a tally of numbers to demonstrate the impact of the plague. The figures are by no means completely accurate: the tardy declaration of influenza as a reportable disease and the sheer volume of cases prevented an exact statistical record from being compiled. Nevertheless, the statistics can perhaps suggest what the situation in Arkansas's heartland was like during that fateful autumn of 1918. Out of a population of approximately 58,000, Little Rock reported 9,813 cases of influenza during the month of October alone; 351 of the sufferers died. At Camp Pike, 6,364 soldiers out of a garrison of 51,956 contracted the flu, and 79 died. At first glance it appears that the soldiers had an easier time of it, but the epidemic at the base hit earlier in September than at Little Rock, and an additional 7,642 cases with 105 fatalities for that month should be added to the Camp Pike tally.<sup>75</sup> Perhaps the best way to gain a notion of the epidemic's spread is not in relating the total figures, but to consider that nearly one out of every four people reported sick during September and October in central Arkansas; every man, woman, and child must have either had influenza themselves or at least knew someone who did.

It would be interesting to speculate how the average citizen reacted to such a climate of foreboding and compare it to our own time. At present we have witnessed an ugly type of bigotry accompanying the AIDS epidemic and the irrational search for a scapegoat on which to blame the plague. For Arkansans in 1918, however, one is struck by the absence of a desire to push away the sick with a gesture of fear. Of course, a comparison between the two epidemics is hardly a fair one, for the influenza outbreak was a rapid-fire phenomenon marked by a tremendous difference between the morbidity and mortality rates, while the AIDS

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<sup>74</sup>James Moshinskie, *Early Arkansas Undertakers* (Hot Springs, 1978), n.p.

<sup>75</sup>Office of the Surgeon General, *The Medical Department of the United States Army in the World War*, Vol. XV, Pt. 2, *Medical and Casualty Statistics*, 973, 989, 1002-1003, 1012; *Arkansas Gazette*, November 1, 1918. All statistics in this paragraph are based on these two sources.

epidemic has proven to be a slowly progressing plague which has killed nearly every one of its victims. In 1918 one could accept the possibility of contracting influenza without fearing certain death, and the awareness of that fact probably contributed to people's willingness to help one another. As Alfred Crosby has so aptly described the country's mood, Arkansans did, by and large, act as if they were all, if not brothers and sisters, at least cousins.<sup>76</sup> Although she still recalls with a trace of bitterness that the flu came to Madison County by way of visiting New England soldiers, Bess Johnson Wilkerson, then eighteen years old, spent long days with her father delivering firewood to stricken families. She deposited the wood on the front porch and quickly left before anyone came outside, though.<sup>77</sup> Lou Steele remembers helping to nurse a family of three who eventually died in Marvell, Arkansas, and that all her neighbors helped one another.<sup>78</sup> When a call for help came from an emergency hospital administered by the Catholic Church in Fort Smith, Emilia Murphy volunteered her services even though she had to commute all the way from Van Buren.<sup>79</sup>

But of all the examples of the sacrifice and charity of ordinary citizens that can be cited, few shine as brightly as the heroism shown by the women of Fayetteville who helped nurse the ailing soldiers of the Student Army Training Corps. While afterwards praising the efforts of Laura Lighton and the other volunteers, President Futrall concluded that "without question it was due in large part to their unselfish devotion that the epidemic was mastered in so short a time."<sup>80</sup> Bud Lighton finally wrote a letter home in mid-October from a convalescent ward at Park Field to admit that he had been sick and had tried to conceal it from his folks to avoid worrying them. When he got a reply and discovered what his mother had been up to, it was his turn to be concerned, and fiercely proud.<sup>81</sup>

Physicians could point to no finer example of taking the Hippocratic

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<sup>76</sup> Crosby, *Epidemic*, 116.

<sup>77</sup> Bess Wilkerson, personal interview at Johnson, Arkansas, August 23, 1987.

<sup>78</sup> Lou Steele, personal interview at Gentry, Arkansas, May 10, 1987.

<sup>79</sup> Emilia Murphy, personal interview at Fayetteville, Arkansas, July 25, 1987.

<sup>80</sup> Fayetteville *Daily Democrat*, October 29, 1918.

<sup>81</sup> Louis D. Lighton, letter to Laura Lighton, ca. October, 1918, Lighton Papers.

oath seriously than their conduct during the epidemic. While recent surveys have implied that a very small minority of today's doctors would, if given the choice, refuse to treat an AIDS patient, the record suggests their counterparts in 1918 did not shirk from their duty. Quite a few, in fact, paid the ultimate price for ministering to the sick.<sup>82</sup> Although the State Council of Defense experienced an initial hesitation on the part of physicians when first asked to register for emergency service, doctors generally complied with the order once it became clear that their services were to be compensated rather than expected as a charity.<sup>83</sup>

We like to picture a country doctor making his rounds on his faithful horse, reaching in the nick of time patients suffering in remote mountain cabins, but more often than not, the automobile became the instrument of mercy for Arkansas's overworked practitioners of 1918. Dr. Christopher Columbus Gray of Independence County had so many patients that his two eldest sons were drafted as his chauffeurs. While making his lengthy rounds from house to house, the overworked physician caught what sleep he could in the back seat of his Maxwell while the boys piloted the vehicle.<sup>84</sup> Dr. C. W. Dixon attempted to treat influenza sufferers throughout Lincoln County by using his new Ford, but found even with the automobile's help he could cover only half of his territory in one day.<sup>85</sup> Automobile-owning citizens in both Fayetteville and Little Rock responded favorably when asked to shuttle doctors, nurses, and food relief teams to their many patients.

In spite of the myriad examples of tremendous personal sacrifice on the part of medical professionals and ordinary citizens, some Arkansans could not help but reflect on their dismal prospects. Sometimes a visual reminder would leave a permanent impression, such as the stack of coffins piled atop a railroad car headed for Camp Pike seen by medical

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<sup>82</sup> Five doctors died fighting the epidemic in Fayetteville and Fort Smith alone. See: Amelia Martin, *Physicians and Medicine, Crawford and Sebastian Counties, Arkansas, 1817-1976* (Fort Smith, 1977), 61; Washington County Medical Society Records, manuscript, vol. 2, p. 149.

<sup>83</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, October 10 and 11, 1918.

<sup>84</sup> Edgar N. Holcombe, "Dr. Christopher Columbus Gray: Community Builder," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, XV (Spring, 1956), 218.

<sup>85</sup> C. W. Dixon, "Discussion," *Journal of the Arkansas Medical Association*, XVI (October 1919), 108.

student Cy Fulmer.<sup>86</sup> After returning from a trip to the West Coast in late October, Pettigrew mining entrepreneur Charles Crawford related seeing express cars loaded with bodies at every stop and concluded, "We are in a day of great danger."<sup>87</sup> Another Little Rock medical student, William E. Bell, volunteered to assist Major Opie's team of researchers at Camp Pike and recalls as his most vivid memory sixty-nine years later the scores of bodies passing through the autopsy room.<sup>88</sup>

The available statistics do not indicate Arkansas experiencing a high mortality rate in comparison to the New England states, but the individual experience with the visitation of death could be just as devastating as an enormous death toll. One overworked doctor in Center, Arkansas, reportedly "cheered" patient Melvin Ladd by crying, "This is my 25th case and I've lost the first 24!"<sup>89</sup> (We can only hope this was not the doctor's standard bedside patter.) People in Little Rock were shaken after receiving the news that Dr. Geiger himself had contracted influenza on October 14. How many recalled the health officer's soothing reassurances earlier in the month cannot be ascertained, but the tragic irony resulting from the death of Mrs. Florence Geiger on October 22 was probably lost on very few. Bud Lighton, still recovering from his bout with the virus as the month of October waned, received a telegram informing him that Claire Tovey, a 1911 graduate of the University of Arkansas and a brother to Bud's close friend Henry, had died in a Virginia military camp. "Oh Lord! I'm so sorry for Henry," Bud wrote moments after receiving the news. "You wouldn't mind if it came in the working of the big fight, but in a way that is apart from it all, it is mighty hard."<sup>90</sup> The same frustrated sentiments concerning the sacrifice far removed from the battlefield of so many fine young men was echoed in a poem which Erwin Funk saved in his Camp Pike scrapbook entitled "The Dead Recruit":

<sup>86</sup> Cy Fulmer, interviewed by Michele Roussel Watson at Little Rock, Arkansas, May 16, 1978, Arkansas State House Commemorative, Oral History Transcripts (Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville).

<sup>87</sup> Charles E. Crawford, letter to Victor Primrose, October 23, 1918, Mooney-Barker-Martin Collection.

<sup>88</sup> William Bell, letter to Kim A. Scott, September 13, 1987, author's collection.

<sup>89</sup> Collier, *Plague of the Spanish Lady*, 105.

<sup>90</sup> Louis D. Lighton, letter to Laura Lighton, ca. October 28, 1918, Lighton Collection.

His not the chance with his own corps,  
 In this great struggle thus to give,  
 His strength and splendid youth to freedom's blade,  
 In training camp his lot to die,  
 A soldier in the making, not yet made.<sup>91</sup>

Perhaps the most eloquent testimony of death's impact on the survivors of the epidemic can be found in the recollections of Mrs. Marjorie Falconer, a Quitman, Arkansas, nurse stationed at Charlotte, North Carolina: "Soldiers were dying like flies. . . . I can't tell you how many. . . . I look back today and wonder where our country would have been if some of those fine men had been allowed to graduate from college. . . . An awful lot of our heritage was really bankrupt at that time."<sup>92</sup>

Reported cases of influenza began to decline as October faded into November, and the quarantine rules were gradually lifted by the now-cautious State Board of Health. The first modification of the state-wide restrictions came on October 25, when for the first time in three weeks Dr. Charles Garrison announced that local boards would be permitted to authorize church services the following Sunday (but, even then, for adults only). While colleges and universities were granted tentative permission to resume classes, public schools remained closed and children under the age of eighteen were restricted to their homes. On October 26 officials informed the public that streetcars would be allowed to carry passengers beyond seating capacity, stores allowed to remain open on Saturday evenings, and pool rooms permitted to reopen "for players only. Onlookers and loafing within pool rooms will not be permitted."<sup>93</sup> A full removal of all quarantine restrictions for Pulaski County occurred on November 4, but the lifting of local quarantine orders remained up to the discretion of the various county boards of health.

There had been a great deal of variance throughout the state in

<sup>91</sup>J. R. Scott, "The Dead Recruit," newspaper clipping in scrapbook no. 1, Funk Papers.

<sup>92</sup>Marjorie Falconer, interviewed by Waddy W. Moore at Dallas, Texas, March 8, 1974, "Oral History of Available Past Presidents of the Arkansas State Nurses Association" (oral history program in cooperation with the State College of Arkansas Oral History Research Office [now the University of Central Arkansas, Conway], History of Medicine Associates Archives, University of Arkansas for Medical Science Library, Little Rock).

<sup>93</sup>*Arkansas Gazette*, October 26, 1918.

observing the quarantine. Some local boards were quite stringent, such as Little Rock's which engaged the services of volunteers to patrol the streets and report violators of the anti-spitting ordinance. When local authorities failed to prevent a circus from opening in Scott, Arkansas, Dr. Garrison sent an officer to the community and had the owner arrested.<sup>94</sup> A curious example of rigid compliance and blatant disregard of the quarantine can both be found in the town of Booneville, Arkansas. On October 11 an outraged Dr. Garrison telegraphed Mayor D. B. Castleberry and threatened to seal off the entire town unless the mayor ordered the town to observe the regulations. Within Booneville itself, however, the State Tuberculosis Sanatorium closed its doors to just about everyone and prohibited all physical contact with the outside world. The stringent quarantine resulted in the institution escaping the epidemic without a single case of influenza and earned superintendent Dr. John Stewart the hearty congratulations of his colleagues.<sup>95</sup>

Just as communities occasionally failed to follow the advice of medical authorities, individuals did not always do as they were told either. "The schools are all closed and no children under 18 are supposed to get outside the yard," wrote Henrietta Dodds to Homer at the beginning of the quarantine in Pine Bluff, "but they do, lots of them."<sup>96</sup> If children found it hard to remain prisoners of the virus, adults also stubbornly resisted changes in their routine due to sickness. Even after contracting the malady, some patients refused to linger in a sickbed and insisted on going about their business. When Homer Dodds's sister, Lessie, came down with the flu at Pine Bluff, she never went to bed at all and even filled in for her employer when he became ill.<sup>97</sup> Edgar Dodds, who only spent a day in bed himself, reported many of his comrades at Camp Pike "didn't even go to bed or stop work" when they got influenza.<sup>98</sup> Bud Lighton found a slow recovery to be unendurable as well. A few days after his discharge from the hospital Bud met his new instructor and attempted a training flight. His miserable performance at the controls

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, October 11, 1918.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*; Brown, "Clinical Lessons," 99.

<sup>96</sup> Henrietta Dodds, letter to Homer Dodds, October 10, 1918, Besom Collection.

<sup>97</sup> Lessie Dodds, letter to Homer Dodds, October 27, 1918, *ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Edgar Dodds, letter to Henrietta Dodds, October 22, 1918, *ibid.*

was followed by a vigorous dressing down by the flight surgeon shortly after landing. After telling Bud he could have gotten dizzy and crashed, the doctor grounded the cadet for an additional week. Bud, realizing that responsibility for the premature flight rested not only with himself, concluded, "I don't like my new instructor much."<sup>99</sup> Brooks Hays's speedy recovery followed close on the heels of a letter he received from his father. "I have an idea that you are 'playing off' to get more attention," wrote Steele Hays to his son, ". . . let me advise you not to make your 'simulation' too severe or prolonged or you will deprive me of a first-class housekeeper and partner and inflict upon yourself the presence of your mother."<sup>100</sup> A few days after digesting his father's advice, Brooks felt well enough to board a train headed for the Officer's Candidate School starting up at Camp Pike. Six of his 300 comrades at Fayetteville who had caught the disease died.

At least some of the impatience of recuperating influenza victims can be blamed on conflicting signals from the press. While doctors remained almost unanimous in calling for bed rest while recovering from the virus, advertisers followed a different code. "Don't let a cold keep you home!" admonished the makers of Dr. King's New Life Tonic, "Small doses once in a while and that throat tearing, lung splitting cough soon quiets down."<sup>101</sup> Not all patent medicine makers were irresponsible enough to encourage early rising after illness, but the tone of their advertisements took a distinctly different turn once the epidemic appeared to be waning in early November. Instead of claiming their products would prevent influenza, manufacturers now stressed their medicine's helpfulness in regaining a patient's strength after an attack. Hood's Sarsaparilla touted itself as a blood builder for recuperating victims, as did Gude's Pepto-Mangan tonic.<sup>102</sup> Some products were genuinely helpful for building strength, such as Horlick's Malted Milk Powder, but what are we to think of the miraculous recovery claims made by the manufacturers of "Smoko Tobaccolless Cigarettes?"<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>Louis D. Lighton, letter to Laura Lighton, "Friday," ca. October 25, 1918, Lighton Papers.

<sup>100</sup>Steele Hays, letter to Brooks Hays, October 6, 1918, Hays Papers.

<sup>101</sup>*Arkansas Gazette*, December 4, 1918.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, December 1 and 5, 1918.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, December 4, 1918.



Louis D. "Bud" Lighton

COURTESY LIGHTON FAMILY PAPERS, SPECIAL  
COLLECTIONS, UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS  
LIBRARIES, FAYETTEVILLE



Lawrence Brooks Hays

COURTESY LAWRENCE BROOKS HAYS PAPERS,  
SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, UNIVERSITY OF  
ARKANSAS LIBRARIES, FAYETTEVILLE

(BELOW) University Infirmary

COURTESY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS LIBRARIES, FAYETTEVILLE



The day finally arrived that every survivor of the epidemic clearly remembers, November 11, 1918, which marked not only the end of the war, but also the end of most quarantine restrictions throughout Arkansas. In many places spontaneous gatherings of celebrants crowded the streets as citizens gave vent to their relief and joy. Unfortunately, the hugging, kissing, and mingling of so many people was exactly the sort of thing authorities had been attempting to prevent the past six weeks. Caution was thrown to the wind now that hostilities had ceased, and many felt as if their loved ones in uniform had been delivered from death by nothing short of divine providence. Sallie Butler Hays well expressed the sense of relief when she wrote to her son afterwards, although it is doubtful that she realized a soldier stationed at Camp Pike had been statistically in greater danger of dying than his counterpart in the trenches of France: "The war is over and we can all have an opportunity to *live* for our country — big, wonderful lives — forgetting the things which are behind and pressing on to the wake of the higher calling."<sup>104</sup> Reported cases of influenza continued to decline in early November, and most were convinced that the epidemic, just like the war, was forever behind them.

But it was not over. Smaller towns in the more remote areas of the state continued to experience a visitation of the virus, and by November 26 the situation had deteriorated so badly in the southern counties that Dr. Garrison warned the press that another statewide quarantine might be necessary. In the same article, Dr. Geiger, just back from Virginia where he attended his wife's funeral, resorted to his now-familiar reassurance to the citizens of Little Rock: "No danger here."<sup>105</sup>

One city that was particularly hard hit during the next wave of the epidemic was Pine Bluff. During the week preceding November 27, 440 new cases were reported, and most of the victims were schoolchildren just recently allowed to return to the classroom. Just why a second wave of the disease swept through the municipality at this time is not clear, but the possibility of antigen drift in the virus cannot be completely discounted. As we discussed at the beginning of our inquiry, once a person

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<sup>104</sup> Sallie Butler Hays, letter to Brooks Hays, November 25, 1918, Hays Papers.

<sup>105</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, November 26, 1918.

has contracted influenza his immune system produces antibodies which effectively stave off future invasions from the same type of virus. However, if the virus becomes altered due to antigen drift, an individual could contract influenza again immediately after recovering from a previous attack. The recurrence of the malady in Pine Bluff at the end of November was marked by its somewhat mild nature, but in order to present a totally convincing case for the change in the virus due to drift, we would have to possess much more accurate figures on how many citizens came down with influenza for the second time. Robert B. Dodds, Homer's younger brother, came down with the flu shortly before November 23, almost exactly one month after he contracted the disease for the first time, but we cannot know if his experience was common or an isolated coincidence.<sup>106</sup>

The despair over the epidemic's recurrence in Arkansas found expression in both public and private utterances. Dr. Garrison, who watched Little Rock's tally climb uncomfortably high, warned that the Board of Health might consider emulating San Francisco and require all citizens to don flu masks.<sup>107</sup> The editors of the *Arkansas Gazette*, now that the war's progress no longer dominated the news, finally took note of the scourge on their editorial page. "Let every resident of Arkansas resolve to do all in his power to prevent another serious outbreak and thereby prevent another period of disaster."<sup>108</sup> At least one man, W. H. Mitchell of Fort Smith, saw the judgement of heaven in the current wave of sickness and expressed himself in song:

It was God's mighty hand,  
He is judging this old land,  
North and south, east and west, can be seen;  
Yes, He's killed rich and poor,  
And He's going to kill some more,  
If you don't turn away from your shame.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>Henrietta Dodds, letters to Homer Dodds, October 25, November 23, 1918, Besom Collection.

<sup>107</sup>*Arkansas Gazette*, November 27, 1918.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*, November 28, 1918.

<sup>109</sup>W. H. Mitchell, "Influenza," broadside, Fort Smith, 1919 (Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock).

Just when the second wave of the epidemic ended depended on where in Arkansas you lived. The dates for communities even in close proximity to one another could vary widely. Art Steele clearly recalls his return from military service to Gentry, Arkansas, on December 20, 1918, and found the epidemic had passed by that time.<sup>110</sup> Only a few miles away at Gravette, however, conditions were so bad on December 20 that local officials reinstated a full quarantine.<sup>111</sup> Robert Leflar, who was sent home to Siloam Springs from Fayetteville for the remainder of the fall term at the beginning of the epidemic, remembers helping his father in his drayage business without witnessing much evidence of the epidemic at all.<sup>112</sup>

About 7,000 Arkansans lost their lives during the epidemic according to most sources, but the real figure will never be known.<sup>113</sup> The United States Surgeon General's official tally for the last four months of 1918 is 4,165,<sup>114</sup> but the plague lasted well into 1919 and many rural fatalities were doubtless not reported at all. Regardless of the body count, obvious questions present themselves: what changes resulted from the epidemic? Can the virus be blamed for the failure of the proposed 1918 constitution, thereby delaying suffrage for women? At least one historian believes so, but even she concedes that other factors kept voters away from the polls that December.<sup>115</sup> Did the shattering experience of treating so many suffering patients inspire Arkansas doctors and scientists to search for a cure? Well, at least some lay researchers tried their hand at it. For example, in 1920 Dr. Harrison Hale of the University of Arkansas chemistry department recalled that no students in his chlorine laboratory were sick during the 1918 epidemic and that workers at a chlorine plant in Ohio also seemed to escape the disease. When it appeared that another epidemic was about to strike the campus, Hale asked for volunteers to

<sup>110</sup> Author "Art" M. Steele, personal interview at Gentry, Arkansas, May 10, 1987.

<sup>111</sup> Susan Parks, "Northwest Arkansas During World War One" (unpublished master's thesis, University of Arkansas, 1987), 72.

<sup>112</sup> Robert A. Leflar, personal interview at Fayetteville, Arkansas, October 5, 1987.

<sup>113</sup> "1918," *Arkansas Times* (June 1986), 73; Parks, "Northwest Arkansas," 72; *Arkansas News* (Little Rock: The Old State House, fall, 1984), 1.

<sup>114</sup> Office of the Surgeon General, *Annual Report of the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service of the United States for the Year 1919* (Washington, D. C., 1919), 186.

<sup>115</sup> A. Elizabeth Taylor, "The Woman Suffrage Movement in Arkansas," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, XV (Spring, 1956), 48.

be placed several times a day into a chamber flooded with a mild chlorine gas and was delighted when only 1 out of 200 developed influenza.<sup>116</sup> Did the epidemic result in significant changes in the structure of the Board of Health? Perhaps some changes were made, most notable being that the governor of the state was given the power to call a quarantine after 1919,<sup>117</sup> but most of the operating mechanism of the board was already in place years before the 1918 epidemic.

Other echoes from the epidemic can be heard in the later experiences of our principal characters. At the University of Arkansas campus in 1919, a student rebellion broke out against President John C. Futrall. A number of grievances were aired against the administration by students as they agitated for his dismissal, but only when it became known that Futrall was pressuring Ma Hardin to surrender to the university money given her by the federal government for nursing soldiers during the epidemic did Brooks Hays join the ranks of the protesters.<sup>118</sup> Hays's participation in the protest gained the movement a great deal of publicity but resulted in his own temporary dismissal from the school. He eventually went on to a distinguished career as a United States congressman and adviser to President John F. Kennedy.

Bud Lighton survived the epidemic and returned home to find his family had also escaped the scourge. In the years following the war he achieved his dream of becoming a pilot and later with his father, William Lighton, travelled to Hollywood, California, where they both enjoyed a certain degree of success as screenwriters for the motion picture business. He retired and eventually died in Spain, the country erroneously credited with originating the deadly 1918 virus.

Henrietta Dodds welcomed both her sons home from the military, and although most of her children were sick at one time or another during the plague, they all recovered. She, like thousands of other Arkan-

<sup>116</sup>University of Arkansas *University Weekly*, February 5 and 26, 1920.

<sup>117</sup>Arkansas Legal Research Bureau, University of Arkansas School of Law, "Report on Arkansas Quarantine Law in 1918-1919," author's collection.

<sup>118</sup>Hays, *Politics*, 42. It is most interesting to note in Hays's autobiography that he never once mentions that he reported sick himself during the epidemic. In his praise for Hardin, he describes the epidemic in the terms of an observer, rather than a participant, leading one to speculate why he so passionately defended Hardin's cause during her quarrel with Futrall.

sans, probably picked up right after the epidemic and went on with her life, never pausing to consider where the disease had come from or where it had gone. Perhaps the answer was not too far away. On the last day of 1918, when Arkansas and the rest of the country stood on the threshold of a new era, a small filler appeared near the bottom of an inside page of the *Arkansas Gazette*:

NORFORK — Many hogs, particularly vaccinated hogs, have been dying in this vicinity from some unknown reason.