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**“None but the Brave Deserve the Fair?”**  
**An Analysis of Lovers Postcards**  
**From the First World War**

Randall Slonaker, *University of Akron, Department of History*

**I**n the Lovers Portraits Vol. 1 binder, part of the David P. Campbell Postcard Collection, over ten percent of the binder’s two hundred and sixty-eight cards feature couples where the man is wearing a military uniform, with twenty-two of these cards depicting men in World War I era, United States military garb. The images and captions featured on these cards evoke familiar ideas of romance, courtship, and marital fidelity. Therefore, I have chosen to write a short synopsis that groups all of the World War One themed cards in this binder in one of three categories: courtship and pursuit, domesticity and marriage, and marital commitment and fidelity. These themes are as relevant today as they were at the time these cards were produced. I have positioned the images and captions featured on these cards in a historical context concerning America during the war. Specifically, I deal with the putative “Crisis in Masculinity” that many hoped would be cured by a regenerative, cleansing war, and the brave new post-war world envisioned by Woodrow Wilson.

Based on this historical context it is interesting to speculate as to how the designers and manufacturers of these cards conceived of their creations. The images and captions featured on these cards indicate that their producers deemed that the combination of patriotism, romance and traditional family values communicated in these messages would resonate with consumers during a time of war and social upheaval.

The bulk of my analysis of these cards is based on the images and captions featured on their front-sides, as the majority of these card-backs are blank, containing no stamps, postmarks or messages. Of the seven cards that do feature personal correspondence messages, only two of them seem like they might be from a lover to a sweetheart, with only one of these appearing to be from a soldier. Therefore, unless I specifically note that the card contains a message on the back-side, the reader can assume that the card is blank. Also, please note, that all transcriptions of messages are verbatim, with misspellings and lack of punctuation included in their original form.

## **The First World War, Militarism and Masculinity**

In order to analyze images of American military men from the First World War, it is necessary to establish how military service was viewed in America during this time. In his book *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920*, historian Jackson Lears explicates the changes in American society that began in the late nineteenth century, and continued to develop into the early twentieth century. He explains that in the era following the end of Southern Reconstruction, Americans of various walks of lives and ethnic backgrounds (including Caucasians, African Americans, Asian Americans, native born, or recent immigrants) all found themselves in an often confusing, increasingly urban and industrialized modern society. During this time, a modern consumer culture and mass media began to grow. Lears proposes that in a variety of ways, all Americans (consciously or otherwise) pursued what he characterizes as “regeneration” or “rebirth”, be it physical, mental, or spiritual. Lears argues that during this time, many politicians and pundits worried that the rapidly changing America was undergoing a crisis of masculinity. Many of these voices posited that the answer to this crisis lie in military service and bemoaned the fact that, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, young, American men did not have the chance to serve in a large-scale war such as the “War between the states” in which many of them had served. Thus, many of these voices enthusiastically supported America’s entry into the First World War, viewing it as a welcome opportunity for national regeneration.<sup>1</sup>

## **Analysis of Postcards: Part I: Everybody Loves a Soldier Boy**

Having established that military service (particularly service in combat) is viewed as honorable and transformative, it is no surprise that producers of postcards would employ images of men in uniform and their admirers and loved ones in these consumer products. The men depicted in these cards were held up as not only exemplars of martial bravery, but also as dependable, solid men who will assume roles as domestic leaders, both in the home and in society upon their return from military service.

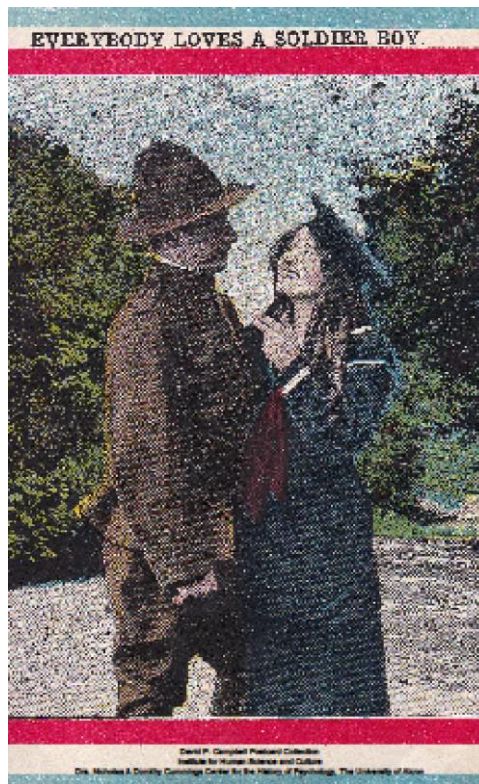
A brief note on the numbering system used in this card binder-the cards in this binder were grouped together by Dr. David Campbell and his assistant Marcha Juozaitas several years ago. While some of the military themed cards happened to

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<sup>1</sup> Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation the Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010), 328.

be grouped together on the same page, others (including works from a series) appear on different pages.

Three cards featured on the same page of the Lovers Portraits Vol. 1 binder reflect this fact. These cards are part of the same series of postcards, which according to the information printed on the card-back are, “Series 560 Soldier & Sailor Lovers-24 des.” No information regarding the name of the company that produced these cards is found on the card-back. All four of these cards feature colorized, photographic images, with a blue, white and red border at the top of the card, and an identical, black typeface for the caption, which is printed in the white portion of the tri-color border. Card #125, features the caption, “Everybody loves a soldier boy”:



[Card #125](#)

In this image, the couple stands in the middle of a tree-lined lane. A grinning man in a dark tan, U.S. military uniform, wearing a campaign hat on his head, stands on the right side of a woman. She has her right arm around his head, and is looking up at him, smiling broadly, gesturing with her left hand. One can

surmise she might be gesturing toward and commenting on his distinctive headwear. She in turn is wearing what appears to be a sailor suit, with a hat that almost looks like a mortar board, covering long, curled hair. The next card in the series, Card #126, features the caption “I’d love to go with a soldier.” In this image, a similarly attired man walks arm in arm with a woman through the woods. Not only are both individuals smiling, but much like the last image, the woman is literally looking up to the man in uniform.



[Card #126](#)



[Card #128](#)

The same couple is featured on Card #128 in this series. Its caption reads, “Called to arms.”

While Card #125 establishes that she loves her “soldier boy,” this card deals with the stark reality of the duties and perils of a “soldier boy.” Instead of a playful image of a laughing smiling couple, this image depicts him holding her tightly, looking as if he is speaking reassuring words to her, while she forlornly looks down, her head turned toward her left shoulder. One way to view these cards as a group is to view them through the eyes of the young woman featured in Cards



#125 and #128. Based on the presentation of her admiration for the soldier, their relationship is based on a paradox. In other words, one can surmise that the very reasons she admires her beau, namely, his bravery and sacrifice for his country, are the very reasons that they must part, albeit (hopefully) on a temporary basis. One wonders if, in addition to her worry about whether he will come back alive, the experiences of war will change him, and the man she knows and loves will not actually return to her.

Another card that illustrates the perceived desirability of men in uniform is card #195, featuring the caption, “A military engagement.” This card does feature



[Card #195](#)

a brief message on the card-back, reading, “Can you picture me in New York[?]” The card is addressed to a Mr. G. W. Palmer, from a person who states their name as G.W.B., thus, not revealing a gender or relationship to Mr. Palmer. The image is a colorized photo of a man and woman standing in a field with mountains in the background. The man wearing the tan, U.S. military uniform and campaign hat stands at his attention, his rifle pointed to the right, as if standing in guard duty. The woman places her left hand on his right forearm and appears to be speaking

words of encouragement to him, and yet she may be playfully grabbing for his gun. One can speculate as to the possible meanings of this gesture. It might be some affectionate fun between two lovers. Or perhaps, it could symbolize something deeper regarding modern womanhood. If so, one interpretation could be that while men venture far from home to defend their country, they do so as a united effort, constantly intertwined with the support and concern of their loved one's back home – a key part of what they are fighting for. One could also surmise that women who were participating in the war effort, working in manufacturing work, might identify with this message that combined the traditional male role with increasing female involvement in military matters. This would also apply to those who supported female suffrage, considering that women were asked to participate in the war effort, in both active and supporting roles, while lacking a voice in the sphere of representative democracy.

These cards help to reinforce the idea of the “man in uniform” as desirable. In other words, not only was he attractive, but dating or marrying such a man would theoretically improve a woman's social status. Thus, it could be surmised that many women of the period would prefer to be courted by such a man, and would strive to maintain a relationship with him. Historian Angela Woollacott addresses this trope in her article, “‘Khaki Fever’ and its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War.” Woollacott establishes that the excitement that was generated among young, British women when viewing throngs of young men in uniform spurred impassioned debate concerning young women's social and sexual behavior. She places these debates within a larger, decades long movement beginning in the late nineteenth century, wherein the upper and middle class reformers and legislators sought to regulate the sexuality of the poor, focusing on fostering improvements to health and fitness and efforts toward prevention of “venereal diseases.”<sup>2</sup>

Another card in this binder that is part of a larger series of cards titled, “Soldier Lover 12 des.” features an intriguing caption when viewed in this context. The caption of Card #135 reads, “Worth fighting for”:

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<sup>2</sup> Angela Woollacott, “Khaki Fever and Its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 2 (1994), doi:10.1177/002200949402900206.



[Card #135](#)

The image is a colorized photo with a stark, black background, with a man in a dark colored, U.S. military uniform that almost blends into the background, as does the dress of his female companion. Key elements of the card are highlighted in bright colors, such as his tan campaign hat, with a bright orange rope adorning the brim. Also highlighted are his gold belt and gold epaulets, with the distinctive “U.S.” insignia. Like most of the cards in this series, the woman is holding a bouquet of flowers, which are also highlighted. The card features another recurring element, as the woman tilts her head, literally looking up to her sweetheart. In analyzing the composition of this image, one might reconsider the meaning of the caption. In other words, at first glance, the most obvious meaning of the caption, “Worth fighting for” might be that the soldier’s lover is one of the reasons he goes off to fight in “The Great War.” Or, having established that American military men represented the ideal future of American society, perhaps the man might be viewed as a prize that any virtuous woman should strive for. Then again, perhaps both of these interpretations could exist simultaneously.

Card #130 is another card in this series that deals with men in uniform and attractive women vying for one another’s affection. Its caption reads, “I am going



to steal right into your heart,” and its image once again features a man in U.S. military uniform, with key elements including the woman’s flower bouquet highlighted.



[Card #130](#)

The idea of a person existing as a prize to be won in a contest are perhaps best exemplified in two cards from this binder. The cards are from two different series, from opposite ends of the binder, yet feature the same caption, “None but the brave deserve the fair.” The phrase is taken from seventeenth century poet John Dryden’s “Alexander’s Feast.” The poem written for St. Cecilia’s Day, and is about a feast Alexander the Great held at Persepolis, following his defeat of the Persian King Darius. One can speculate that not only was the saying, “None but the brave deserve the fair” part of the popular lexicon, but specifically, that lovers of romantic poetry may have delighted in the linkage associating military valor with romantic courtship.

Card #37 features this caption, accompanying the colorized image of a woman sitting on the right side of a man in a U.S. military uniform, his cap in his hand. He head is tilted toward her left shoulder, and like the previous images, she is literally looking up to him.



[Card #37](#)

Card #193 features this same caption, supplementing a color illustration of a man in U.S. military uniform surrounded by two women.

The young man has his right arm around the waste of a pretty young woman with dark hair. She is wearing a dark-blue long dress, with a tasteful, frilly white collar. The dark-haired young woman has her head leaning on his shoulder, with her eyes tilting up to look at him adoringly, with what might be described as a worshipful, or perhaps even submissive gaze. On his left side stands a woman who is slightly taller than the other woman. This woman is also quite pretty, with golden blonde hair. She is dressed more flashily, with a white dress, with a robe-like, belted, stripped jacket, hanging partially open in what might be considered a suggestive manner. She also gazes up at him, with a look that might signal admiration, while also denoting pursuit or possessiveness. In analyzing this unique



[Card #193](#)

card, one wonders exactly who is the pursued, who is the pursuer, and therefore, who exactly does the caption refer to? In other words, if the two women are indeed competing for the affections of the “Soldier boy,” is it because men of his caliber are the ideal, and thus a rare commodity “worth fighting for”? If so, this establishes women as warriors, at least as capable, if not more capable than men at least in some ways.<sup>3</sup>

### **The brave soldier boy: “Over there” and on the “Home front”**

The messages communicated in the captions and images featured on the previous groupings of cards can be viewed in entirely new ways, within the context of the purported “crisis of masculinity” during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as explicated by scholars such as Lears and Blight. In other words, for decades, several prominent voices had bemoaned the perceived crisis in

<sup>3</sup> Once again, the message on the back of card #193 does not conform to the romantic, heroic, or military theme featured on the artwork or caption on the card’s front. It reads, “While I have some spare time so thinking of dropping you a line. I got your address from Henry but if you answer I will write more next time Your friend Pat Mabis William (illegible) Prairie (illegible).”

masculinity, and posited military service, specifically combat service in a noble war as the best possible cure to this putative crisis. As mentioned, Lears positioned this perceived crisis within the larger idea of a national scale “regeneration” or “rebirth.” He argues that the ultimate culmination of this decades long pursuit of regeneration was the United States military’s involvement in the First World War, under President Woodrow Wilson in 1917.

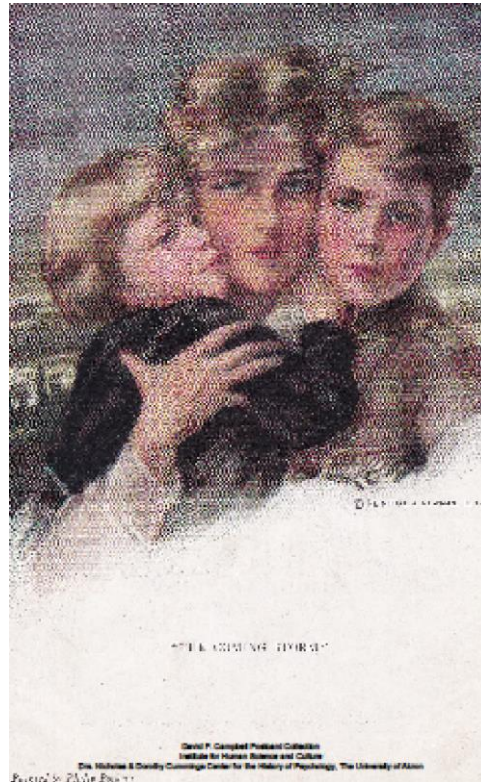
Wilson’s capacious vision of the war and its purposes not only involved American regeneration, but in a sense, encompassed a rebirth of the entire world, or at least, the existing world order. In one sense, he entered America into the fray, because of the fact that America could not influence the peace, without sacrificing American “blood and treasure” in the war. While on the one hand, this impulse could be viewed as extremely “American centric,” Wilson envisioned a post-war, world order where a League of Nations would be established in order to prevent another war of the magnitude of this “War to end all wars.” In short, Wilson envisioned a post-war world where in his words, America would “Make the world safe for democracy,” and with the rest of the world at peace, America could focus on fostering justice and economic growth on America soil.<sup>4</sup>

When provided with this context, the images in this next grouping of cards take on a new significance. These cards feature images of American military men and their loved ones on the home-front. One way of viewing these cards within this historical context is that these images depict who the men of the U.S. military were fighting for, namely the loved ones of soldiers. Unlike many of the previous cards, these images not only feature depictions of couples involved in courtships, but also marriages, families and homesteads that soldiers long to return to. The historical context provided by scholars such as Lears illustrates the imagined future that these men hoped to provide to their loved ones, as they journeyed far away from home.

One example of this is Card #82, featuring the caption, “The coming storm.” One reason this card is intriguing is that while it is filed in the “Lover’s Portraits” binder, it is one of the few cards in the binder that depicts an image containing a woman without an accompanying man. The illustration, painted in the art nouveau style by illustrator Philip Boileau, portrays a mother with her two young sons cling to her, on each side. The younger of the two boys, who looks to be approximately four to five years old, clings to her on her right side, and appears to be wearing a black sailor suit. Her older son, on her left side looks straight

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<sup>4</sup> Lears, 328.



[Card #82](#)

ahead, dressed in a dark khaki military uniform. One can surmise that her husband is off to war, or at the very least, is stationed somewhere far from home, awaiting deployment, while she tends to the two sons, dressed in uniform in order to honor and emulate their absent father.

The imagery within this painting speaks to the aforementioned concerns regarding the perceived crisis in masculinity, and its intersection with the issue of national regeneration. The background of the painting with its stormy skies could represent the geopolitical crisis of the World War, and its potential threat to peace on the American domestic front. While America would not face combat or bombing attacks on its shores, the “coming storm” did cause a great deal of social upheaval in America as hundreds of thousands of men went overseas to serve, and scores of women, including the wives of servicemen, worked in munitions factories. Thus, the metaphorical meaning of this storm could be twofold, in that it simultaneously represents disruptive chaos, as well as an opportunity for personal and national rebirth out of this chaos. The opportunities for rebirth borne of this chaos are various. One interpretation of this artwork pertaining to the



aforesaid crisis in masculinity could be that this crisis not only provided an opportunity for men to assert their masculinity, and model this masculinity to their sons, but that women could also assert their strength and influence. On the one hand, this interpretation would conflict with a more traditional argument concerning masculinity that essentially posits a “zero sum game” line of reasoning. Within this line of reasoning, masculinity and femininity are binary opposites, with masculinity synonymous with strength and assertiveness, and femininity equaling meekness and passivity. However, a progressive era interpretation of femininity posited that while women were indeed the “fairer sex,” and therefore more genteel and innocent, this was precisely why they should have an expanded role in public affairs, in order to counterbalance and ameliorate a world dominated by men.

The artwork in this painting could be interpreted to support any of these schools of thought regarding gender roles in this era. The painting features a solitary, strong yet nurturing female figure who assumes the role of caretaker and head of the household while her husband is away at war. The fact that the boys are dressed in military uniforms also speaks to the fact that their father is a role model to be emulated.

Card # 132 also depicts a woman who is thinking of her soldier far from home.



[Card #132](#)

In this image, a woman appears in the lower left-hand corner of a card as a cartoon style image of a handsome sailor, contained in a circular frame, much like a



thought balloon floats in the upper right-hand corner of the card.<sup>5</sup> The caption reads, “I miss you! Across the miles my thoughts fondly roam to you.” However, in this image, no children are featured, and we are left to wonder whether she is a soldier’s wife, or a sweetheart or fiancé. Does this couple have children? If not, is a family something they plan to pursue after the war? The fact that these questions are left unanswered speak to the fact that this card may have appealed to a broader audience of viewers and potential consumers than the previous card, with it more specific imagery pertaining to family and parenthood. The handwritten message on this card is incongruent with the romantic imagery featuring a valiant soldier. It reads, “Hello. I got-home all O.K. found ma all right. Got my train, good Bye. Fred, Clark”

A caption on yet another card in this series, that of Card #133 reads, “When you come home.” Not only does this card’s caption refer to the domestic sphere that this couple will inhabit together upon his homecoming from the war, but the image is quite unique. Once again, the man wears a dark uniform that almost blends into the black background, with his front pocket, epaulets, collar and hat highlighted with brighter shades of color. The woman, like those in other cards, tilts her neck to look upward, yet instead of gazing with longing admiration toward her husband, she appears to look off in the distance, perhaps picturing their imagined future together, rather than focusing on the travails and fears of the present.

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<sup>5</sup> The message on card #132 reads, “I miss you! Across the miles my thoughts fondly roam to you”. The message on this card is incongruent with the romantic imagery featuring a valiant soldier. It reads, “Hello. I got-home all O.K. found ma all right. Got my train, good Bye. Fred, Clark”



[Card #133](#)

In another card in this same series, Card #136, features an image of another couple in similar dress with similar highlighting of key elements. The card's caption reads, "Oh for the sweet moments again." One can surmise that again, this man and woman look forward to a pleasant, imagined future, rather than an uncertain present. Once again, this message can simultaneously be viewed on two levels. Perhaps this couple views the war that causes them to be separated and puts him in harm's way to be a temporary barrier to their union. But, it is possible that the war can be conceived of as a means for securing a brighter, more stable future for the couple to live in.



[Card #136](#)

Card #121 features a military themed pun in its caption, which reads, “Fire when you are ready.”



[Card #121](#)

The image is an illustration of a man in a tan military uniform, ranger's hat upon his head, his back toward a fire in the hearth, as he embraces and kisses a woman on the cheek. Viewing the symbol of the timepiece in the context of their relationship, it could simply serve as a reminder that time spent together is precious due to being finite. Thus, time together is not to be taken for granted, especially considering that the man in the image may be about to go abroad to risk his life in combat. In addition, the timepiece could also symbolize the “forward march of time” as it relates to a rapidly changing world and country, where the home that the soldier longs to return to may exist within a world than that of only a year or two previous.<sup>5</sup>

The next card in the binder is also a card from the First World War. It is Card #122, featuring an illustration of a man in a tan uniform, leaning forward as he clasps hands with a woman in a blue dress, as she leans forward to kiss him. The caption is a quote from Romeo to Juliet, reading, “Parting is such sweet sorrow.” Once again, the romantic image on the front of the card is incongruent with the message on the card-back, which



[Card #122](#)

reads, “My dear Mother, Arrived here all right -- last night at 9:30. I am feeling fine to-day except a little sore from the trip. I will write again later. The mail is ready to go now. Love to all. Write soon. Your affectionate son, Jesse.”

While most all of the cards that depict American military men of this era feature young couples, an exception is Card #39, whose caption reads, “Good luck till we meet again.” In a colorized photo, a couple posed in front of a sunset background, stands in a green pasture, with bright red and yellow flowers. The man, dressed in tan, World War I era military uniform, wearing a campaign hat, his rifle propped against his side, faces a woman as they clasp one another’s hands. He is slightly portly, and his physique and face are that of a middle-aged man, and thus we can speculate that as opposed to sweethearts or fiancés, this card is intended to depict an established, long-married couple who hope that after the war, they can continue to have many long years of marital bliss ahead of them.



[Card #39](#)

It is interesting to compare this card to Card #82. Both cards feature images that allude to committed, long-term family relationships. Like the image in Card

#132, one wonders if this couple has children, and therefore, what the soldier and his wife perceive that he is fighting for? This man and woman appear to be middle aged, in contrast to the youthful looking sweethearts featured in most of the other military themed cards. Due to their age, can we surmise that this man might be a career military officer, or perhaps even an older, military reserve member mustering for duty.

Does he believe that he is indeed helping to create or preserve a better world for himself and his loved ones? Do he or his wife believe that he is a worthy husband because of his military valor? Or, does he merely hope to complete his tour in order to come home safely to his home and family?

### **Keep on Fighting the Good Fight: Fidelity and Temptation**

While several of the military themed cards in this binder deal with the pursuit of an ideal mate, and several others deal with the domestic sphere inhabited by such couples, another associated set of ideas involves long-term commitment and fidelity. It was understood that when men were stationed far away, whether on a military base located in the United States, or in a foreign locale, the temptations to stray from one's sweetheart were abundant. Part of this understanding lie in the aforementioned fact that fit, young men in uniform held a certain allure for a large number of women, as well as the fact that men stationed far away from home could grow lonely, and seek comfort in the arms of another. This applied to married men, as well as those engaged to be married, or involved in courtships. Thus, it is not surprising that this binder contains a number of cards that refer to themes concerning fidelity.

Viewed as a whole, the postcards in this grouping present a challenging set of messages. Implicit within these captions is the understanding that distance from a loved one, the stresses and challenges of military service and the temptations available to men in uniform can put a strain on relationships. However, what is also implicit in the messages conveyed in these captions is that not only can these challenges be overcome, but that the idea of a future spent with a loved one back home can serve as the inspiration that can help a “soldier boy” to endure the hardships of war.

Card #127 is one of the cards in the “Soldiers and Sailor Lovers Series” featuring the blue, white and red border, and its caption reads, “Don’t forget the one who loves you.”





[Card #127](#)

This card, like those in the previous section deals with the domestic sphere. Like those cards, one can surmise that the message concerns an imagined, ideal future as opposed to focusing on the dangers of the present. However, in this card, the perceived dangers don't just involve injury or death in the war, but rather, the heart growing cold, or being warmed by temptation. The image is that of the now familiar man in tan uniform and campaign hat, this time with a heavy pack on his back. With their small cottage in the background, they stand outside the picket fence gate bordering their lawn, as they clasp hand, and look into one another's eyes. The young couple's body language, including the intent gazes between them indicate mutual affection and intimacy. Therefore, one wonders if the caption, "Don't forget the one who loves you" is aimed at one of them, or rather, both of them?

Card #134 also deals with the themes of memory and fidelity. Its caption reads, "Forget-me-not", and is yet another card in the "Soldier Lovers" series, with the black background and a colorized photograph with key image highlighted.



[Card #134](#)

His left arm is draped over her shoulder, and while his left eye face her, his right eye is gazing partially forward. One interpretation of this image could involve the caption referring to the fact that the soldier literally has a “wandering eye,” where he simultaneously kisses his sweetheart while casting his gaze about for other women. However, one could also surmise that he is a faithful, perhaps even jealous lover who is not casting his eye about for other attractive women, but rather, is on the lookout for other male suitors who may seek to woo his sweetheart in his absence.

Yet another card from this same series deals with the theme of memory and fidelity. The caption of Card #56 reads, “Don’t forget the one you left behind.”



[Card #56](#)

Once again, a colorized photo is used, but instead of a stark, black background, a sky blue background is employed. A woman on the left side of the image stands with both of her hands grasping the epauletted shoulders of her soldier sweetheart, once again, looking upward at him, this time with what appears to be an insistent, imploring gaze. Due to her body language, in this card, unlike the previous cards of this type, the caption concerning fidelity and memory seems to be directed solely to the soldier.

Perhaps the most poignant example of a card dealing with the theme of remembrance and fidelity is Card #190. Once again, the image is a colorized photo of a man and woman facing each other, embracing. However, in this instance, the couple are not young, but rather, appear to be a middle-aged couple. Therefore, one can presume that they may have been married for several years, and may also have children at home. As opposed to a short, one line phrase, the caption on this card reads, "With eyes to eyes and breast to breast Dear love, we know few words are best. But could a million words convey, My thoughts for you when far away."



[Card #190](#)

The message on the card reads, “I am awful sorry [illegible] that your mama is not feeling good and I sure do hope she is all right by now tell her and dad I sed hello. I sure would love two be with yous all two Day. I would give anything if I was there two Day holding you in my arms like this picture hun. Well my dear I hope it on't be long till I can and by the looks of things I don't think it will be long till I will be back to you dear, Well my dear you will haft to excuse me for not writing any more as I have now more cards or any writing paper, so my dear I will have to say by by for this time, but will drop you a card when I get to my [illegible]. So by by my dear for this time. With [illegible] hugs and kisses [illegible].”

The content of this personal correspondence is perhaps the most intriguing card – not only of this subset of military themed cards, but perhaps of the 268 cards in this binder. It features a long, hand-written message from one lover to another. The person’s name is illegible, but due to the language regarding emulating the actions of the man in the photograph, one can assume the writer is a man writing to a woman. He never states he is a soldier, but never states otherwise. What combines with the message to make this extremely intriguing is the fact that this



long message covers the entire card-back, and the card contains no postage stamp, postmark, or mailing address. Was this postcard sent in a sealed envelope, or part of a larger parcel of mail?

Another set of cards from this binder are quite intriguing, partly because of the fact that I am not sure where they fit in the aforementioned categories of attractiveness and pursuit, domesticity and fidelity. They both feature silhouette style images, where only the outline of the man and woman are discernible. The caption on Card #123 reads, “Black-outs haven’t bothered us –so far.”



Card #123

Silhouetted against the background of a dark blue sky, with a yellow moon in the background, this card shows a man in uniform, wearing a garrison cap, holding a voluptuous woman. He is looking down toward her, she is looking up at him, and their lips are pursed, as presumably, they are about to kiss one another. Card #124 features another silhouette image, of what is probably the same couple. In this image, the young couple are smooching and embracing while sitting on a park bench, against the background of a dark, night sky illuminated by a large yellow moon reflecting off of the water, with the silhouettes of trees bordering each side

of the image. The caption, much like its companion card, involves military terminology, in this instance, in a punning manner, as it reads, “Close order thrill.”



[Card #124](#)

Actually, the words are, “Close order drill”, with the word “drill” crossed out, and the word “thrill” replacing it. One way of interpreting these cards involves the established trope of women being attracted to men in uniform. Regardless of whether this was true, young, enlisted men must have certainly hoped that this was true. Furthermore, these same men may have also hoped that their time in the service would prove to be very liberating, as they were away from the prying eyes of those in their hometowns, and therefore free to interact with a variety of young women. These men may have been single, and never enjoyed such freedom and choice before, or they may be engaged or married, and seeking comfort in the arms of another. This leads to an even more controversial idea, concerning the sexually arousing elements surrounding the danger of military service and war. While most people do not associate the grim realities concerning the danger of war with sexual arousal, it has come to be understood that the “fear center” within the amygdala that readies the human body to be appropriately “aroused” when confronted with



fear and danger is located adjacently to the sections of the organ involved in sexual arousal. Even if danger does not appear eminent, it was well-known that men in the service would often try to compel women to agree to engaging in sexual intimacy by stating that they were about to be shipped off to a combat zone. Bearing this in mind, one can speculate that unlike many of the other military themed cards in this collection, this card was probably designed to appeal more to male consumers than female consumers.

Card #194 is another card that proves interesting, partly because it is so hard to categorize, as it seems as if it might fit into a few different categories. While these qualities may present a challenge to those creating categories pertaining to curation and finding aids, these same qualities probably helped this card appeal to a variety of male and female consumers, due to its aforementioned ambiguities which allowed for a myriad of fantastical, romantic interpretations. Its caption reads, “If wishes came true” and features an illustration of a man in military uniform, holding his rifle while standing by a lake. He is standing next to a woman, who upon closer inspection, is actually a see-through apparition. Is he visualizing a loved one from back home? If the vision is based on a real woman, is she merely someone he knows, and wishes he were closer to? Is she an old sweetheart, whom he has broken up with? Or, is she his actual sweetheart, fiancé or wife whom he remembers and longs for? Based on these questions, what category does the card fit within?<sup>6</sup> Once again, partly due to the non-gender specific name (or more precisely, initials) of the sender, it is hard to read much into the message on the back of the card.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Once again, the message on the back of this card (#121 is completely incongruent with the romantic, chivalric imagery on the card-front. This personal correspondence communication is from a woman who names herself as “Cousin Lena”, writing to her cousin Maud, asking Maud to ask a woman named Anna to send her some thread for a sewing project she is trying to complete.

<sup>7</sup> The message on the back of card #194 reads, “Little Rock Ark Dear Claudia Having a fine trip. Don’t write till you here from me in a letter. Be about seven days. E.B.”



[Card #194](#)

In the First World War, women appeared in a number of active roles. However, in these cards, only one postcard features a depiction of women in a military role. Lynn Dumenil explicates the role of women in this war in, *The Second Line of Defense: American Women and World War I*, where she illustrates that American women contributed to the war effort during the First World War in unprecedented ways. She establishes that while in past wars, women had been “camp followers,” cooks and nurses, the First World War was the first time the efforts of women were “formalized and tied to the bureaucratic organizations of the modern state.” Dumenil notes that scores of women worked in munitions factories while their sweethearts, husbands or male family members served overseas. She cites an account from YWCA staffer Henrietta Roelofs, who recounted the story of a young woman receiving a poem titled, “To the Girl I Have Left at Home Behind Me,” written by a soldier who described his sweetheart as, “sitting patiently, suffering, sorrowing, waiting for the time when he should win the war and come home to her.” Roelofs remarked that the girl was “probably working in a munitions factory and the queer part of the thing is that the boy knew

it but so little had the real military value of her work entered into his mind that he still was holding in his imagination the same idea which men held a hundred years ago.”<sup>8</sup> This casts many of the previous cards in a new light, as they all feature brave men in uniform, and loyal women, as opposed to any depictions of women working in the war effort.

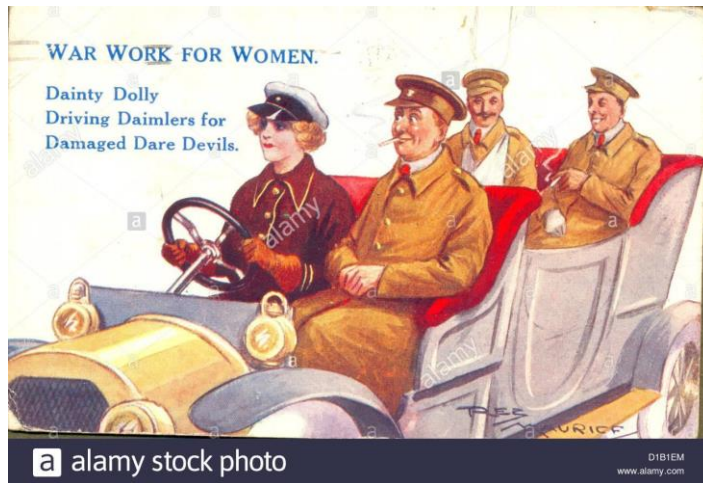
Officially, women were not allowed to serve on the front-lines, but thousands of women (almost always, well-educated, middle-class, white women) served in the war in a number of capacities. Many women worked in the medical field, laboring as nurses, surgeons or ambulance drivers. Many followed in the “social work model” developed during the Progressive era, and were viewed as “maternal reformers,” as they served as YMCA canteen workers. In addition, women served in the Signal Corps (Sometimes known as “Hello Girls”). Dumenil posits that American women’s service at home and abroad during the First World War helped precipitate Women’s suffrage, while simultaneously, women were still largely viewed as “weaker vessels” who should continue to be relegated to the domestic sphere.<sup>9</sup> Most of the military themed cards in this binder seem to reflect this traditional, latter view.

This image is one of many that can be found online that feature women working in the war effort, and serve as a contrast to the sorts of traditional, domestic images featured in the Lovers Portraits binder. While the image features a woman performing important work during the war, the alliterative caption reading, “WAR WORK FOR WOMEN. Dainty Dolly Driving Daimlers for Damaged Dare Devils” would be interpreted by most modern readers as quite condescending.

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<sup>8</sup> Lynn Dumenil, *The Second Line of Defense: American Women and World War I* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 11.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.



Therefore, Card #189 stands out as being unique, as it depicts women in military uniform. Its caption reads, “Protected.”



[Card #189](#)

The image is a colorized photo, set against a background of an American flag, flapping in the breeze, mounted on a flagpole. Two women face toward one

another, each holding a rifle, pointed upward at a diagonal angle, with a man standing between them, underneath the two rifles as he grasps the rifle stocks, one in each hand. The women have both have very serious looks on their faces, the one on the man's right side wears a blue jacket and white skirt, while the woman on his left side wears a similar uniform featuring a dark skirt. He stands between them, a smile on his face wearing a suit and fedora, while grasping both rifles. While the previous card features women's important role in the war effort while condescendingly referring to traditional gender roles, this card's caption and message seems to completely dismiss the role of women in the military.

Another unusual aspect of this card is the fact that while this is the only card in the binder to feature women in military uniform, the message on the card-back is the only one that is written by someone explicitly purporting to be a soldier, as the writer refers to himself as "Grover the Soldier." The message reads, "My dear little Joyce how are you I am doing pretty good wish I could see you all again write me a long letter your welc Grover the Soldier." One can speculate whether Grover picked this card to send a message contrasting his masculinity and superiority with the condescension toward perceived ineptness or flaunting of traditional, feminine gender roles displayed on this card.

The military themed cards featured in this binder are a very small sample of the thousands of such cards that were produced. In order to establish whether larger patterns among images, captions and personal correspondence messages exist, it will be necessary to examine as many postcards of this sort as possible. For instance, future students could peruse the other "Lovers Portraits" binders, as well as boxes and binders containing military themed cards to investigate such possibilities. Hopefully, this analysis is the first step of a much larger process that may yield results for scholars and casual postcard lovers alike for years to come.

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