

## [Dr. Curtis Atkinson]

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Dulaney, Ethel C., P[W?]., [Wichita?] Falls, Texas

Words 1275 [49?]

Page 1 REMINISCENCES CENTERED AROUND [CALL?] FIELD

By Dr. Curtis Atkinson, Major M.R.C.,

Post Surgeon, Call Field Hospital.

Dr. Curtis Atkinson lives on [Folk?] Street in Wichita Fall, and maintains an office in the First National Bank Building. He has continuously practiced medicine here since the breaking up of Call Field at the close of the World War.

"I came to Wichita Falls, September 10, 1917, and was the first soldier [in?] uniform on duty on at Call Field. I came as a First Lieutenant, Medical corps from the [Medical?] Officers' training camp, at Fort Riley, Kansas.—The reason that I was sent to Call Field during the construction of the field was the fact that the flying fields in the northern [part?] of the United States which had been opened—a great deal of sickness and [intestinal?] trouble, which—was due to unsanitary conditioning. —For that reason when the eight fields of Texas were started—medical officers were sent to each of them—Call Field has named for Lieutenant Call, one of the first fliers who was killed during the earliest days of flying.

"During my services as sanitary office to Call Field—there was a great shortage of water—and we had several conferences with the city officials regarding the water supply and the purity of the water. A medical official from the Surgeonn Surgeon General's office in Washington, D.C., was sent here to [look?] into the situation. At that time thecity water

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department—was using an old fashioned method of purifying the water by chloride of lime. This was not [adequate?] and I requested that the city authorities put in a liquid chlorinator—This was denied, so I took it up with the Chamber of Commerce, —feeling that unless we were [assured?] a pure as well as adequate supply of water I would be compelled to recommend to the medical department at Washington a change of the field. C - 12. Tex. 2 “Judge R.E.Huff was president of the Chamber of Commerce.—He—asked: 'What do you want and what will it cost?'—This chlorinator cost \$1,000, and the Chamber of Commerce [empowered?] me to wire New York for one immediately, which was installed at the water tower at Call Field.

“The septic tank for the disposal of the sewage from Call Field had been completed—and I was not justified in a proving it. I reported to Washington—and they sent back orders to have the septic tank destroyed and built along more modern lines.

“I felt that my promotion to be a Captain on December 18, 1917, was due to my activity as a sanitary officer. In March, 1918, I received my commission as Major, M.R.C., U.S.A.

“Major Brooks had been assigned as commanding official of Call Field, but as he was in Honolulu he did not arrive here until sometime after the field had been organized—November 25, 1917. Officers that participated in the organization were Majors [Kraft?], Pratt and Walton.—Major [Kraft?] was a senior official, also acting Commander; Maj. Pratt was Adj., and Maj. Walton was in charge of flying; Maj. Brooks did not remain very long, and was followed by Maj. Alfonte, who remained until a short time before the Field was closed.

“The first onlisted enlisted men to arrive were—regular army men from Honolulu—about December 1, 1917, and complained a great deal of the cold weather—The first flying [cadets?] were five young men from California.

“The hospital was organized November 27, 1917; the first patients were men with an attack of measles—The entire equipment had not been installed and [we?] cared for

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them on cots—The hospital as first planned was a forty-bed hospital, [later?] enlarged to sixty beds. 3 The hospital had, besides the medical and surgical departments, a complete pharmaceutical department and X-ray and Dental Departments, — separate building was erected for testing men for flying—We also had an eye-ear-nose and throat specialist.—

“Soon after the organization, Maj. [Kraft?] appointed me recruiting Officer to add to my many duties—This was done so as to enable some young men of Wichita Falls to join the army before they were [conscripted?]. Among those which I recall that I enlisted were Earnest [Fain?], [Jouette?] [A?] Banner, [W?].U.[McCutcheon?], and [Homer?] Karrenbrock.

“The flying cadets come here for instruction after finishing ground school. —they were [ovod?] to advance fields for advanced flying. —The greatest number of the personnel would not exceed 1,250 at any one time.

“ [thirt?] thirty to forty enlisted men of the medical department did most of the nursing, cooking and general hospital work. [We?] also had from three to six regular army nurses —[these?] were women. During the 'flu' epidemic we hired [?] some extra nurses here in Wichita Falls.

“When the 'flu' epidemic struck Call Field, Sunday, December, 1918—the boys began to come down very rapidly.—A foot ball game was in progress—The commanding officer immediately ordered the game stopped and sentinels posted at the gate of the field with orders that no one was to be admitted. —It was very hard for the citizens of Wichita Falls to learn that a military quarantine could not be evaded. Within an hour the two ambulances were very busy taking men from the different parts of the camp to the hospital, and by the next day the hospital was filled to its capacity—All enlisted men of the medical department were placed in tents and barracks used for hospital purposes. Other barracks were available—and immediately transferred into an emergency hospital.

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After 4 we began using this emergency hospital the sick men were sent there first, and those that became very ill or developed pneumonia were moved to the hospital proper, and the convalescents from the hospital proper were moved to the emergency hospital. One ambulance was kept busy at this work. There were so many men stricken with the 'flu' that the regular routine of the flying instruction was nearly at a standstill. On account of this arrangement no soldier in Call Field suffered from the lack of medical attention, and the death rate from the 'flu' epidemic was next to the lowest of any field or camp in the United States.

“During my regular duties, I—made a sanitary inspection of the camp each day.—Major Jas. A. Alfonte often accompanied me on this inspection. The enlisted men referred to us as the 'Gold Dust Twins'. The sanitary condition was such that when Col. Lewis, Sanitary Inspector of the United States Army gave Call Field the highest rating. We had a clean and sanitary camp. Once a week I made an inspection of the [cafes?], restaurants, soda fountains, etc. in Wichita Falls, which were patronized by the soldiers. Mrs. T.B.[Smock?] [was?] City Inspector and accompanied me on [these?] trips. Some places would not pay any attention to her orders, but a notice that I would post soldiers at their door to keep the soldiers out brought quick action.

“During the oil boom at Burkburnett in the winter of 1918, the 'flu' and sanitary conditions were so bad at the Burk oil fields that they appealed to us for help. Following an inspection, I detailed a medical officer and a regular army nurse to Burk and they made daily trips and helped to take care of the needy in the oil fields for a month or six 5 weeks at the expense of the United States government.

“The people of Wichita Falls were very loyal and very much interested in Call Field. They lent every cooperation—The women visited the sick of the Hospital regularly and brought flowers, cheer, comforts, and delicacies to many a lonely soldier.

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“The local Red Cross met our every wish, and supplied us many things we needed in a hurry and could not get through regular army channels. As [best surgeon?], I want to acknowledge the many courtesies shown the personnel of the Hospital as well as the sick by the people of Wichita Falls.”