The American Expeditionary Forces In Action: Drawings of Capt. George Harding
V.S.R. Official Artist A.E.F.
IMAGE DESCRIPTION:
This is an assemblage of photographs and prints of original drawings by George Matthews Harding, a Philadelphia-born artist and architect. Before becoming a full-time artist and writer, Harding worked briefly as an architect while studying art at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. He was an illustrator for *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Harper's Monthly*, taught briefly at the University of Pennsylvania and Moore College of Art, and established his own studio. In addition, Harding painted mural decorations for theaters, hotels, and other civic projects.

Harding was also one of eight individuals selected as American Expeditionary Force combat artists in the First World War. Commissioned as officers within the Army Corps of Engineers and given little (or no) military training, combat artists were tasked with producing original artwork that depicted the wartime experience of American soldiers serving in France. This is the first instance in the American Army of men commissioned solely to produce art. Given the use of an automobile and granted free-reign to travel, these eight men created various pictorial representations, in a variety of mediums, which were submitted for publication to the Committee of Public Information (the government's propaganda arm during the War).

Despite the objective technologies of still photography and the motion film camera available by 1917, there was still a desire on the part of the American government to record the war subjectively. In the eyes of General John Pershing (who personally approved the establishment of the role of combat artists), these artistic renditions would not only contribute to the visual historical record of the War, but also prove amenable to propagandists repurposing.

Harding was sent, with almost a million other American servicemen, to the Meuse-Argonne sector of the Western front in the summer of 1918. Harding made his way with the AEF through the dense Argonne forest and surrounding French villages, sketching the individuals and activities he encountered.

Images depict generic soldierly tropes, as well as specific military engagements and events:

Image 002 contains an inscription and dedication by Harding to his friend Samuel Sturgis.

Images 003-023 contain pictorial representations of common tasks delegated to enlisted men in the First World War. These include night patrols often one of the most immediately hazardous "jobs"; working parties in which soldiers would often venture into No Mans Land to dig sapping trenches, repair/embellish barbed-wire defenses and to reconnoiter enemy movements; and interacting with captured German soldiers. Also contained are drawings directly associated with particular AEF divisions, battles, and events throughout the summer and fall of 1918.

Images 024-032 include sketches of home-front war industry from the Second World War. These include submarine frame factories; munitions plants; naval yards, and assembly-line workers.

Images 033-035 contain photographs of Harding, taken during his tenure as a combat artist in the Pacific
theater during the Second World War.

[Note: Image titles are drawn from captions supplied by Harding, located in the SE corner of each image.]

INSCRIPTION:
OF AN EDITION OF FIVE HUNDRED COPIES
THIS PORTFOLIO OF PLATES IS NUMBER 269

PUBLISHED AND COPYRIGHT 1920
BY GEORGE HARDING
10 SOUTH 18th STREET
PHILADELPHIA (Inside cover, printed)
To Dr Samuel Booth Sturgis,
with Mrs. Harding and everyone's sincere
appreciation of all he has done for the
"Harding Family."
From one Captain to another Captain of the A.E.F.
George Harding
Dec. 12th 1932 (Inside cover, written)

FORMAT:
Drawings; Watercolors; Photographs

ARTIST:
Harding, George Matthews