

Oscar Sherwin Staples, M.D.
Massachusetts General Hospital World War II Massachusetts General Army
Evacuation Hospital
Photograph Albums, 1942-1945
MC 16

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By Olivia Mandica-Hart

ACQUISITION: The photo albums were donated to The Archives and Special Collections of the Massachusetts General Hospital by Katherine E. Staples, daughter of Dr. Staples, on January 11, 2012.

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Biography

Dr. Oscar Sherwin Staples was born on May 19, 1908. He received his degree from Harvard Medical School in 1935.

From 1939 to 1942, Staples was on the staff of the MGH and practiced orthopedic surgery in Boston, in association with Edwin F. Cave, M.D. (Harvard Medical School, Class of 1924). Staples then spent three years on active duty in the Army Medical Corps. His first assignment was with the 6th General Hospital, and his final assignment with the 95th Evacuation Hospital. He saw duty in North Africa, Italy, France, and Germany. He was released with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Staples was among the earliest volunteers to be recommended for commissions by the MGH hospital authorities. He began his war work as a Captain in the orthopedic division of the 6th General Hospital in Camp Blanding, Florida in May of 1942. Then, on December 24, 1942, Staples was promoted to the rank of Major, and was transferred to the 3d Convalescent Hospital at Camp Livingston in Alexandria, Louisiana. He remained in service until the end of the war.

In January 1946, he joined the orthopedic surgery staff at the Hitchcock Clinic in Hanover, New Hampshire, and also taught at Dartmouth Medical School. After he retired from the Hitchcock Clinic at the age of 65, he served for many years as an orthopedist, and then as an orthopedic consultant, at the VA Hospital in White River Junction, Vermont. He also served on the editorial board of the Journal of the American Osteopathic Association. Dr. Staples died on December 2, 2002.

Scope and Content Note

Dr. Staples traveled extensively throughout Europe, and his black and white photographs provide significant visual insight into the life and travels of an army surgeon during the Second World War. Staples captured scenes of American military and medical accommodations, camps, and hospitals (such as operating tents), both domestically and abroad, in Western Europe and North Africa. Additionally, there are several scenes of European cities devastated by wartime violence. For instance, the album contains photos of German tanks throughout Italy during the summer of 1944, wreckage near St. Raphael, France, and German prisoners in Sarrebourg, France.

The first photo album begins with photos from May 1942 at Camp Blanding, Florida, and captures some of the army medical camp life within the United States. The second photo album features photographs almost exclusively of Germany and Austria, and include photographs of the medical corps on V.E. Day, Belgians marching home through Salzburg, Austria, a German army vehicle pool, the anti-aircraft car used on Hitler's train, and Hitler's mountain retreat in Berchtesgaden.

All of the photographs are dated, and the locations are identified; however, the individuals photographed are not named. The "Pictorial History of the 6th General Hospital," which can also be found in the MGH Archives, may aid researchers in establishing a larger context for the photographs, as well as aiding in the identifications of some individuals.

Researchers who want to know about World War II field medicine, the conditions under which American medical personnel performed their duties, wartime and post-war social conditions, the effects of aerial bombings, and other war-related matters will find much of interest in these photograph albums.

Photo Album 1

The first photos show Camp Blanding, Florida in May 1942. Then, throughout the summer of 1942, Staples took photos in St. Augustine, Florida; Fort Story, Virginia; Virginia Beach; and Camp Edwards, Massachusetts. Photos from these locales are mostly of the military bases and hospitals. Staples remained at Camp Livingston, Louisiana from September 1942 to August 1943. From there, Staples traveled to Oran and Ain el Turk in North Africa; Naples; Pompeii; Sorrento and surrounding towns; Capri; Mount Vesuvius in eruption; Santa Maria; Capua; Pignataro; Cales; Cassino; Caranola; Itri; Rome; Grossetto; Corsica, France; Southern France; Cogelin; Gonfaron; St. Raphael; Cannes; Saulx de Vesoul; Luxeuil les Bains; Renauvoid; Epinal; Golbey; Mutzig, Germany; Sarrebourg; Paris; Brussels; Dijon, France.

Also included in this album is a hand-labeled map of North Africa and Western Europe, another smaller map of Europe, as well as a printed "Chronology of the Italian Campaign" list.

Photo Album 2

The first photos show the environs of Sarregemines, Germany in March 1945. Subsequent pictures depict Kaiserslautern; Dreisen; Wurms and Bensheim; Kist; Wurzburg; Rothenburg; Donauworth; Ebermergen; Harburg; Oberammergau; Garmisch-Partenkirchen; Eibsee; Augsburg; Innsbruck, Austria; Salzburg; Berchtesgaden, Germany; Munich; Stuttgart; Heilbronn; Heidelberg; Bretten; Maulbronn; Marburg; Paris.

Also included in this album is a hand-labeled map of Germany, and a map of "Obersalzberg: Hitler's Mountain Retreat."

Related Collections

There are several pertinent related collections in the MGH Archives that may also be of interest to researchers.

For further information on Dr. O. Sherwin Staples, please consult:

Staples, Oscar S., M.D. Biographical File

WWII - Doctors' Military Addresses (Accession 2007-13)

For general information relating to the hospital's role in World War II, please consult:

Faxon, Nathaniel W., M.D. *The Massachusetts General Hospital, 1935-1955*.
(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959).

Pictorial History, 6th General Hospital

U.S. Army 6th General Hospital Records, 1917-1918, 1939-1946

Wars - World II - (citations, medal, etc.)

Wars - World II - (civilian consultants)

Wars - World II - (group pictures)

Wars - World II - (killed in action)

Wars - World II Miscellaneous