The plague that came out of Fort Riley

This book review by Arthur F. Duncan, of the Kansas City Star, details the Influenza of 1918, its impact on Fort Riley, and eventually, its rapid spread throughout most of the world. Duncan reports that, according to A.A.Hoehling's book, "The Great Epidemic," the Influenza of 1918 likely started in Fort Riley and Camp Funston before spreading throughout the globe.

Creator: Kansas City Star

Date: March 10, 1961

Callnumber: K355.R45 Clipp. Fort Riley, Vol. 4, 1960-1981, pg. 7-8

KSHS Identifier: DaRT ID: 217233

Item Identifier: 217233

www.kansasmemory.org/item/217233

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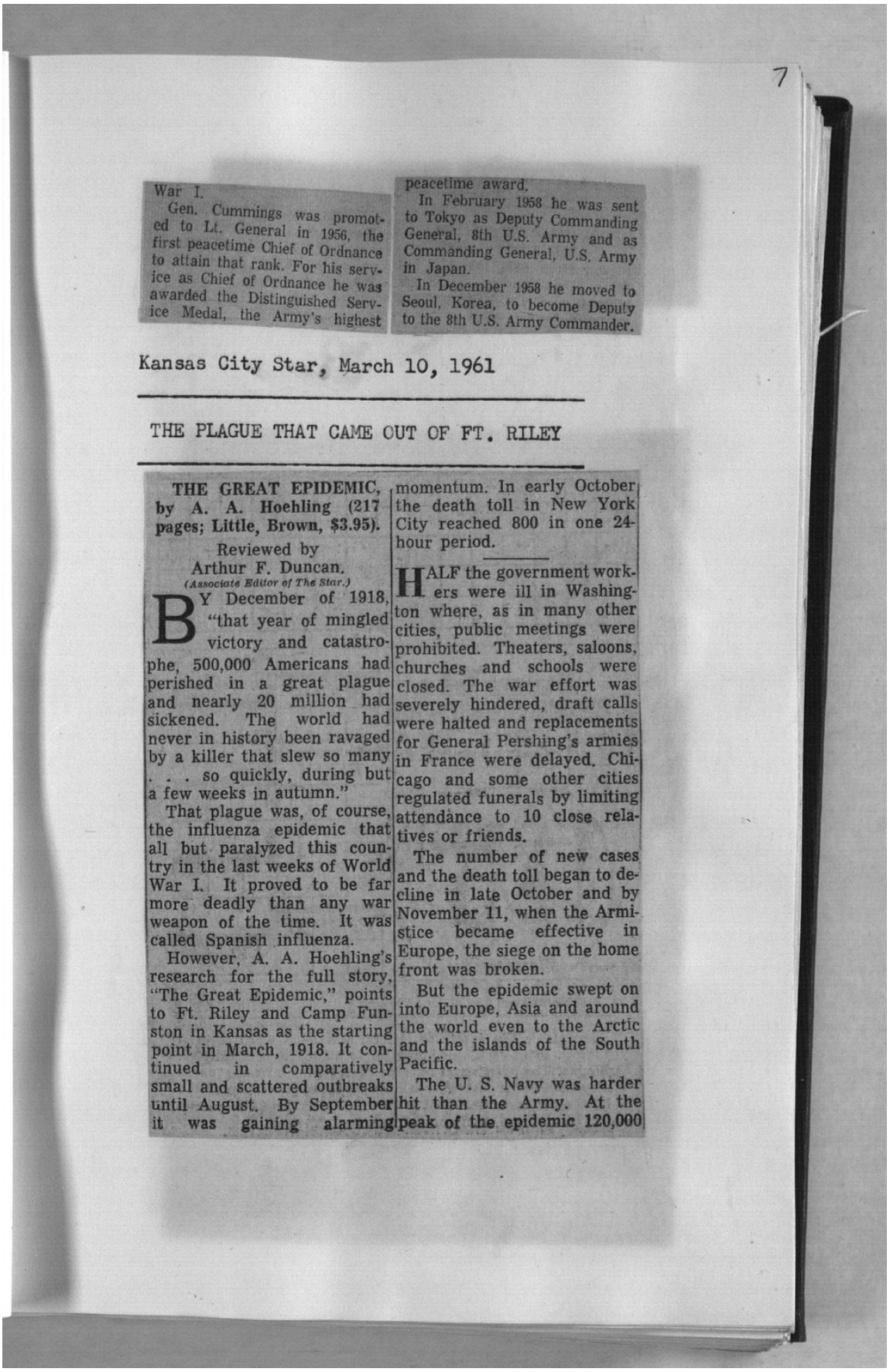

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War I.

Gen. Cummings was promoted to Lt. General in 1956, the first peacetime Chief of Ordnance to attain that rank. For his service as Chief of Ordnance he was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal, the Army's highest peacetime award.

In February 1958 he was sent to Tokyo as Deputy Commanding General, 8th U.S. Army and as Commanding General, U.S. Army in Japan.

In December 1958 he moved to Seoul, Korea, to become Deputy to the 8th U.S. Army Commander.

Kansas City Star, March 10, 1961

THE PLAGUE THAT CAME OUT OF FT. RILEY

THE GREAT EPIDEMIC, by A. A. Hoehling (217 pages; Little, Brown, $3.95).

Reviewed by
Arthur F. Duncan.
(Associate Editor of The Star.)

BY December of 1918, "that year of mingled victory and catastrophe, 500,000 Americans had perished in a great plague and nearly 20 million had sickened. The world had never in history been ravaged by a killer that slew so many . . . so quickly, during but a few weeks in autumn."

That plague was, of course, the influenza epidemic that all but paralyzed this country in the last weeks of World War I. It proved to be far more deadly than any war weapon of the time. It was called Spanish influenza.

However, A. A. Hoehling's research for the full story, "The Great Epidemic," points to Ft. Riley and Camp Funston in Kansas as the starting point in March, 1918. It continued in comparatively small and scattered outbreaks until August. By September it was gaining alarming momentum. In early October the death toll in New York City reached 800 in one 24-hour period.

HALF the government workers were ill in Washington where, as in many other cities, public meetings were prohibited. Theaters, saloons, churches and schools were closed. The war effort was severely hindered, draft calls were halted and replacements for General Pershing's armies in France were delayed. Chicago and some other cities regulated funerals by limiting attendance to 10 close relatives or friends.

The number of new cases and the death toll began to decline in late October and by November 11, when the Armistice became effective in Europe, the siege on the home front was broken.

But the epidemic swept on into Europe, Asia and around the world even to the Arctic and the islands of the South Pacific.

The U. S. Navy was harder hit than the Army. At the peak of the epidemic 120,000

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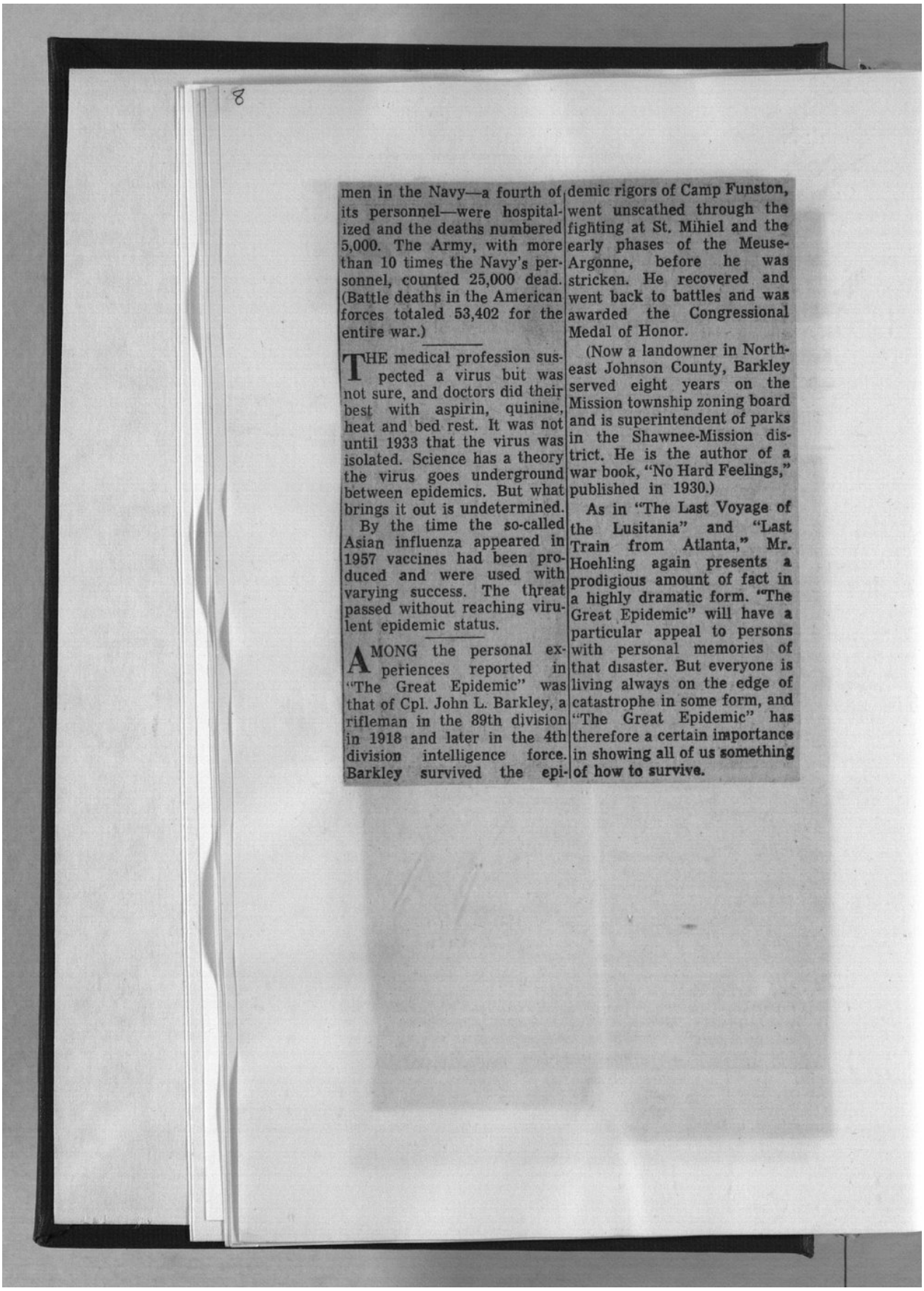

men in the Navy—a fourth of its personnel—were hospitalized and the deaths numbered 5,000. The Army, with more than 10 times the Navy's personnel, counted 25,000 dead. (Battle deaths in the American forces totaled 53,402 for the entire war.)

THE medical profession suspected a virus but was not sure, and doctors did their best with aspirin, quinine, heat and bed rest. It was not until 1933 that the virus was isolated. Science has a theory the virus goes underground between epidemics. But what brings it out is undetermined.

By the time the so-called Asian influenza appeared in 1957 vaccines had been produced and were used with varying success. The threat passed without reaching virulent epidemic status.

AMONG the personal experiences reported in "The Great Epidemic" was that of Cpl. John L. Barkley, a rifleman in the 89th division in 1918 and later in the 4th division intelligence force. Barkley survived the epidemic rigors of Camp Funston, went unscathed through the fighting at St. Mihiel and the early phases of the Meuse-Argonne, before he was stricken. He recovered and went back to battles and was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

(Now a landowner in Northeast Johnson County, Barkley served eight years on the Mission township zoning board and is superintendent of parks in the Shawnee-Mission district. He is the author of a war book, "No Hard Feelings," published in 1930.)

As in "The Last Voyage of the Lusitania" and "Last Train from Atlanta," Mr. Hoehling again presents a prodigious amount of fact in a highly dramatic form. "The Great Epidemic" will have a particular appeal to persons with personal memories of that disaster. But everyone is living always on the edge of catastrophe in some form, and "The Great Epidemic" has therefore a certain importance in showing all of us something of how to survive.