



National Museum of Health and Medicine

Otis Historical Archives

OHA 309 Sontag Collection

Accession Number: AFIP 46305

Date of Records: 1899-1944

Size: .25 linear feet, 1 box

Finding Aid: by Laura Cutter (2012)

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Biographical Note: Charles Gustave Sontag (also spelled Sonntag) was born in Charleston, South Carolina in 1872. He entered military service during the Spanish-American War as a member of Company L, 1st South Carolina Infantry Regiment. When the war was over and Sontag had been discharged, he volunteered his service in Major Walter Reed's experimental yellow fever group at the Columbia Barracks, near Havana, Cuba. This group was entirely voluntary, as exposure to yellow fever could result in death, but their sacrifice was made "for the sake of humanity."

Throughout the late-nineteenth century, yellow fever epidemics routinely swept through the southern United States and during the Spanish-American War, losses from yellow fever were thirteen times higher than deaths from military operations. Reed's work, based upon the theories of Cuban doctor Carlos Finlay, eventually proved the hypothesis that mosquitoes transmitted the devastating disease.

After being exposed and bitten by an infected mosquito, Sontag became ill with yellow fever and was admitted to the hospital on February 10, 1901 and was discharged on March 12, 1901. During his hospital stay, Sontag lost 50 lbs and felt the effects of the disease for the rest of his life. Sontag eventually returned to South Carolina and settled in Gaston, where he married and became a farmer. In 1931, Congress awarded the yellow fever volunteers and doctors the "Conquest of Yellow Fever" medal, as well as pension of \$125 a month. Several of the awards, including Walter Reed's, were awarded posthumously. Sontag died on February 20, 1937 at the age of 64. He was buried in Arlington Cemetery with full military honors.

Series/Scope and Content Note: This collection includes photographs of Sontag from the 1930s, as well as a group photograph of the yellow fever volunteers. There is a small amount of personal correspondence, including a letter to Sontag from his mother. The collection includes the temperature,



or “fever charts”, of Sontag and two other men (Harry Franklin, diagnosed with typhoid fever and Frank Heinsler (?), who died from yellow fever). There are also newspaper clippings about Sontag, including his obituary from 1937.

BOX AND CONTENT LIST

Box 001:

00001: Sontag’s original case folder, 1901.

00002: Correspondence, 1910-1935.

00003: Yellow fever and typhoid fever temperature charts: Charles Sontag, Harry Franklin, and Frank Heinsler (?), 1899-1901.

00004: Portrait of Sontag, 1931.

00005: Sontag receiving the “Conquest of Yellow Fever” medal, 1931.

00006: Sontag at Clemson A & M College, Atlanta, GA, 1895.

00007: Photograph of a field with cows [Camp Lazear?].

00008: Notes on the treatment of dysentery and typhoid fever, Post Hospital, Columbia Barracks, Cuba, October 28, 1900.

00009: Notes on identifying individuals in a photograph of the yellow fever volunteers, 1900-1935.

00010: Photograph of yellow fever experiment volunteers, 1900.

00011: Newspaper clippings, 1931-1944.