

Mrs. Eloise Seay Mathis - Part 3 - WWII

This is the third and final part of a series of interviews with Mrs. Eloise Seay Mathis. Mrs. Mathis is 95 years old and grew up in Pacolet Mills. This interview is about her memories of World War II.

Her granddaughter, Drenda-Michell Brennan, has been essential in allowing us to do this. We have supplied the questions to Drenda via email. She has talked to her grandmother about the questions and recorded her answers.

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You were about 14 years old when [World War II](#) started. Please tell us about the following:

1. Were you aware much about the war through the radio news and movie newsreels?

Granma says they heard most of their news through their Atwater Kent radio. Her father like to keep up with what was going on so all the children had to sit down and be quiet during the news broadcast. The 'Atwater Kent' was in the den under the windows...for the best reception. It was the size of a piece of furniture with wires running through two rooms. Granma remembers when men visited with her father, they were frequently gathered around... bent in over the radio closely... to hear the news.

2. Were you ever afraid during the war? Do you remember air raid drills and blackouts?

"Oh yes, we were afraid all the time!"

Until Pearl Harbor was attacked Granma never remembers being afraid or even very aware that a war was being fought in Europe. She does, however, distinctly remember the day President Roosevelt announced that Pearl Harbor had been attacked and declared war. She was with my grandfather at her sister and brother-in-law's house when they heard the President speak on the radio. She remembers leaving immediately after the President spoke. They were in shock over the attacks and anxious and wanted to get back home.

Everybody was afraid. Women were warned that if we were invaded the enemies would not show mercy to women or children. They lived in constant fear of what would happen to their families and most especially, their children, if the enemy were able to land ships on US soil and take over.

Granma remembers living beside the mill at [Converse](#) during the blackouts. She said they were frequent and somber events. During the blackouts, "You couldn't burn lights and you had to draw your curtains. Men walked up and down the road to patrol and make sure there was no light and that no one turned anything on." But Granma says she never remembers anyone not cooperating, "everyone tried to do their part."

3. Did you have any close family members that went into service? Were any of them in actual combat?

My grandmother never says anything 'unlady-like'during the course of these interviews at one point she stopped and talking and looked into my eyes and told me, "War is Hell"it struck me that I had never in my entire life heard her say anything that 'harsh' before...

My grandmother went to [Pacolet High School](#) with Gordon Harvey from [Whitestone](#). They were the same age and classmates through school. He was a kind young man that came to their home often and she had always had a special 'fondness' for him. She remembers the day her sister, Opi, came in crying and told them that Gordon had been killed.

My grandmother's Uncle Bob Seay fought in the war and met his wife Alfa, a nurse from New York that was also serving, while he was in Europe. He made it home and they had a long life together.

Her brother-in-law, John "Junior" Mathis was also 'called' (1) and he served under General Patton during the war. She remembers him telling stories of riding in a truck and one of the soldiers with him being shot beside him, of 'swimming and General Patton, himself, swimming across the river alongside them to battle', and US soldier's bodies being stacked 'like cord wood' after a battle. My Uncle John came back from the war a much changed and 'nervous' man. Granma recalls that after he returned, when he would walk down the road at night, he always kept his Zippo cigarette lighter burning in front of him because of his anxiety.

"A lot of boys were killed"...she remembers small flags in the windows of many with blue stars representing how many sons they had serving. When one of their sons was killed the flag was changed and a gold star represented the son that had died in battle. Many homes had multiple stars on their flags. In those days, a taxi was the messenger that came to deliver the news that someone had been killed. It was always the same taxi. My grandmother's voice is still full of emotion even after all of these years, as she remembers that when the taxi was spotted heading their way everyone 'called and yelled out that the taxi was coming'. Women stood in silence in their doorways and at the road as the taxi approached their street. She stood with her mother-in-law and they held her breath and prayed the taxi would pass by their house many times...and then their hearts ached as they watched to see where he stopped.

My grandfather had a skin condition, tinea versicolor, that caused allergic reactions to wool. He was 'called-up' (1) twice and both times dismissed after failing his physical because of the wool clothing and blankets used in the military.

4. What do you remember about products being rationed?

"All the money in the world wouldn't help you, you couldn't get it without a government stamp.

The government sent you 'Ration Books' and you could buy whatever you had a stamp for if you could find it. You couldn't get a lot of anything, times were lean so you just made do with what you could get."

Food, shoes and gas were all rationed. (See photo of gas stamp on page 7 that Granma has saved.) George Littlejohn was a farmer...that also owned the local gas station on Highway 29 at Converse Mill. The government had an 'agreement' with Mr. Littlejohn that he was to return to farming full-time during the war to plant and produce food 'for people to live.' While Mr. Littlejohn turned his attention to farming, he asked my grandfather, Wallace 'Doc' Mathis, to run his gas station. This was a good arrangement with my grandfather since he was not able to serve. So, my grandfather left his sales job and

he and my grandmother moved into a house beside [Converse Mill](#) and ran the gas station during the war. Both of their sons were born during that time period.

Milk is the rationed item that Granma remembers being the hardest for her. My grandparent's first son, Mitchell Mathis, was born in 1943. By this time rations were in place and '...baby milk was the hardest thing to find....even if you had a stamp you couldn't find it.' My grandfather and my Aunt LA, my grandmother's sister that lived with them and also had an infant, would 'drive all over the place for miles in different directions hoping to find a can of evaporated milk...or any kind of milk....' Granma spent a great deal of time worrying about how they were going to feed their babies.

5. What do you remember about [Camp Croft](#)?

Granma lights up at the mention of [Camp Croft](#) and says "...there were boys from EVERYWHERE...ALL OVER THE UNITED STATES!" She remembers seeing the soldiers '...marching in large groups all the way up and down the side of the roads on the way to and from Pacolet.'

Granma married in November of 1941 ...but her house full of sisters and cousins made the most of the opportunity! My Aunt Mick (Mildred Seay) and their cousin, Roxie, worked at [Camp Croft](#) 'in the KP'...where they served food to the soldiers. Granma says that the taxis would 'load up with soldiers and bring them to Pacolet.' They would even come to church and lunch on Sundays. She laughingly remembers her youngest siblings, my Aunt Nelleen and my Uncle Moon, 'chaperoning' because 'there were so many boys at the house all the time' ...but her father was uncharacteristically 'okay with it because they were serving the country and away from their homes. He would do anything for the soldiers.'

Granma told a story of Mother's Day during the war and a church full of soldiers at [Pacolet Mills Baptist Church](#) and laughs "...we thought they knew what we knew." As they entered the church on Mother's Day there was a basket of white and red roses being handed out that everyone was choosing from and pinning on as they went in. Traditionally a red rose honors your mother if she is living and a white rose honors a mother that has passed away. ...obviously this is a southern tradition because Granma still giggles as she remembers, "...you should have seen it, half the church was full of soldiers jumping up and changing flowers when the preacher was explaining the symbolism during the sermon."

She also has a great story about a soldier (Red Ryber) whose mother hitchhiked alone from Wadsworth, OH to [Camp Croft](#) to see him while he was stationed there.

Granma told of many instances of the government 'taking land from people to use for the military camp during the war.' Granma's older sister, Rachel, married into the Sherbert family...the Sherbert's owned a dairy between Pacolet and the camp site. The camp became so expansive that the government came in and '...took the dairy and moved it.....barns, milking equipment, cows and all to Roebuck.' After the war they moved it

back, but ‘they took the land to use as part of [Camp Croft](#) for training during the war.’ Granma says this was not unusual and that there is ‘a whole section of town’ in Pacolet ([Pumpkin Center](#)) that was built for the purpose of housing people who were displaced from their homes during the war and that ‘...they built it practically overnight and it’s still there today.’ Granma doesn’t speak resentfully about ‘the government taking the land’...she says, ‘there were a lot of necessary hardships that everyone had to endure during the war to do their part.’

Oh! ...and my grandmother’s cousin, Roxie that worked in the KP (kitchens an mess halls)...she did find herself a handsome soldier and married him...and she got a desperate, loving, hitchhiking mother-in-law to boot....Roxie Pugh-“Ryber” did live happily ever after!

6. Do you remember when the war ended? Did your family celebrate?

Granma remembers the waiting ...in the mill village at [Converse](#)... anxiously waiting‘to hear about the peace meetings with Churchill and President Truman’. ‘Kinsey Littlejohn held onto the ropes all day to blow the mill whistle and for the bells to ring...it didn’t happen that day...’, but when it finally did happen everybody was CELEBRATING! The mill whistles and car horns blew! And there were HAPPY MOTHERS! ... young boys were coming HOME!Granma tells these memories with misty eyes and great joy!

She says when the war ended people began to ‘run to the stores’ first thing.

The government agreement with Mr. Littlejohn also ended and within days he left farming and returned to his gas station and my grandfather to his sales job at Harbison Furniture Store.

Notes

(1) Being “called up” was a general term for being drafted and inducted into the armed services. Most went into the army but some were drafted into the navy and the marines. The Induction Letter or “Greetings” letter, as it was sometimes known, for Eloises’s husband, Wallace Mathis, is shown on Page 6.

Additional Photos and Items

The following pages contain items of interest to all three of the Interviews of [Mrs. Mathis](#).

Prepare in Duplicate

Local Board No. 72	47
Spartanburg County	083
	072

130 N. Converse St.
Spartanburg, South Carolina
(LOCAL BOARD DATE STAMP WITH CODE)



JUL 7 1943
(Date of mailing)

ORDER TO REPORT FOR INDUCTION

The President of the United States,

To Wallace Mitchell Mathis
(First name) (Middle name) (Last name)

Order No. 11105

GREETING:

Having submitted yourself to a local board composed of your neighbors for the purpose of determining your availability for training and service in the land or naval forces of the United States, you are hereby notified that you have now been selected for training and service therein.

130 N. Converse St.

You will, therefore, report to the local board named above at SPARTANBURG
(Place of reporting)

at 8 A.M. m., on the _____ day of _____, 1943
(Hour of reporting)

This local board will furnish transportation to an induction station. You will there be examined, and, if accepted for training and service, you will then be inducted into the land or naval forces.

Persons reporting to the induction station in some instances may be rejected for physical or other reasons. It is well to keep this in mind in arranging your affairs, to prevent any undue hardship if you are rejected at the induction station. If you are employed, you should advise your employer of this notice and of the possibility that you may not be accepted at the induction station. Your employer can then be prepared to replace you if you are accepted, or to continue your employment if you are rejected.

Willful failure to report promptly to this local board at the hour and on the day named in this notice is a violation of the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940, as amended, and subjects the violator to fine and imprisonment.

If you are so far removed from your own local board that reporting in compliance with this order will be a serious hardship and you desire to report to a local board in the area of which you are now located, go immediately to that local board and make written request for transfer of your delivery for induction, taking this order with you.

El Johnson
Member or clerk of the local board.

U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE 16-18271-5

D. S. S. Form 150
(Revised 1-15-43)

A T T E N T I O N

The Commanding Officer at the Induction Station has issued the following warning for the benefit of SELECTEES about to be inducted and physically examined.

1st. "That no intoxicants will be tolerated."

2nd. "That Selectees arriving at the Induction Station intoxicated or under the influence of intoxicants necessarily delays the physical examination and all such cases will be referred to the proper authorities and dealt with accordingly.

Don't permit anything to blot or stain your Service Record with demerits that can be avoided when inducted.

This information is passed on to you for your government, and we trust you will conduct yourself accordingly.

This was an attachment to Mr. Mathis's Induction letter. It gave warning advice to the new inductees.



This is a close up of a gas ration stamp as discussed in the interview.

"Honor and shame from no condition rise,
Act well thy part, there all the honor lies."

SIGNATURE OF PARENT OR GUARDIAN

1st Month *Mrs. W. H. Mathis*
 2nd Month *Mrs. W. H. Mathis*
 3rd Month *Mrs. W. H. Mathis*
 4th Month *Mrs. W. H. Mathis*
 5th Month *Mrs. W. H. Mathis*
 6th Month *Mrs. W. H. Mathis*
 7th Month *Mrs. W. H. Mathis*
 8th Month *Mrs. W. H. Mathis*
 9th Month *Mrs. W. H. Mathis*
 10th Month *Mrs. W. H. Mathis*

The parent or guardian is respectfully requested to examine and sign this report each month, and cause its return to the teacher.

It is hoped that parents will cooperate with the teacher in all efforts made for the improvement of the school.

Parents are cordially invited to visit the school.

MADE BY BOSTON, BENTLEY, BOSTON, U. S. 15-3769

Pacolet Mills School

Monthly Term and Annual Report of

Belovine Gray
Grade

for the school year *1927-1928*
F. P. Hill Teacher

Teachers will fill out, at the end of the year, the books needed for the ensuing year, when pupils are promoted.

Reader _____
 Speller _____
 Arithmetic _____
 Geography _____
 Grammar _____
 Language _____
 History _____
 Hygiene _____

Preserve this report for future reference.

SUBJECTS	1st Mo.	2nd Mo.	3rd Mo.	4th Mo.	5th Mo.
Days Present	20	20	20	17	19
Days Absent	0			1	1
Times Tardy					
Department					
Reading	B-	B+	B-	C+	A-
Spelling	B+	B	A	A	A
Writing					
Arithmetic	A-	C+	B+	B+	C+
Geography	C	B	B	B	B
Gram. or Lang.	B+	B	B	B	C
U. S. History	C	B	C	C	B
Hygiene	A	B	B	C	A
Music					
Drawing					
S. C. History					
Algebra					
Domestic Science	C	C	B	B	A
Shop					

	6th Mo.	7th Mo.	8th Mo.	9th Mo.	Av. Yr.
Days Present	18	18	20	20	172
Days Absent	1	0			3
Department					
Reading	A	A	B+		B+
Spelling	A	B	A	B	B
Writing					
Arithmetic	B	A	B+	A-	B
Geography	B	B	B	B	C+
Gram. or Lang.	B-	C+	B-	B+	B-
U. S. History	C	C-	B	C+	B
Hygiene	A-	A	A	A-	B+
Music					
Drawing					
S. C. History					
Algebra	B	A	A		B
Domestic Science					
Shop					

CERTIFICATE OF PROMOTION

I Certify that *Belovine Gray* is eligible for promotion to *8th grade* Teacher _____

F. P. Hill, PRINCIPAL

*—100
 A—90-99
 B—80-89
 C—70-79
 D—Failure

Mrs. Mathis's 7th grade report card showing her promotion to the 8th grade.



Photo Credit: Kenneth Bridges

Oct-1952 Historic Town of Cowpens, S.C.

Photo showing a busy day on Main Street in Cowpens.