

WWI Profile: John Rivers Smith, 1898-1956

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GUEST COLUMNISTS

John Rivers Smith lies in an unmarked grave in Smith Cemetery in Southport. Census records including him with his wife and children have not been located. As a result, more details and historical records than usual are presented below in order to link him to his descendants and preserve the details of his WWI service.

Smith was born in Southport, son of Robert Calvin Smith and Eliza Jane Galloway. In the 1900 Census, his father is listed as a carpenter.

The 1910 Census shows that his family lived at 318 Rhett St. Another WWI veteran, Robert Leroy Stratmon, was his neighbor. Stratmon died while serving in WWII.

Smith's parents are listed as baker and assistant baker. Attempts to discover if they operated a bakery inside their home were unsuccessful.

Previous posts introduced the Students' Army Training Corps and his fellow corps members from Southport, Oliver Banks and Elmer Davis.

Like Banks and Davis, Smith did not become eligible for the draft until the registration of Sept. 12, 1918. His draft registration shows he was employed as a cook in Southport.

Banks, Davis and Smith met the physical and educational requirements of the SATC, volunteered, and were accepted. All three served in the SATC at Negro Agricultural and Technical College (now NC A&T State University) in Greensboro.

Smith was honorably discharged on Dec. 12, 1918.

No additional census records could be located for Smith. However, his family's 1930 Census record shows his sister Marion Jane Smith had married William L. Davis in Southport and was living in Chadbourn, Columbus County, N.C. Their sister Katy Ruth and mother Eliza lived with them. William Davis worked as a fireman at a railroad and Marion ran a filling station. Marion was described as attending school. As the 1940 Census shows, she eventually completed four years of college.

William Lee Davis was also a WWI veteran. His service card from Georgia. He was born in Tennessee and was a resident of Savannah, Ga. (at least one son from a previous mar-

riage was born there). Corporal Davis served stateside in the 425 Labor Battalion.

The 1940 Census indicates that William continued working for the railroad as a fireman. As mentioned, Marion's educational level is shown as four years of college. Marion and John's mother Eliza was still living with them. Katy Ruth was not and efforts to find records for her were unsuccessful.

Nephew John Robert Smith, age 8, also lived with Marion and William. Quite a few records exist that indicate this is John Rivers' son. These include not only John Robert's records, but John Rivers' son Charles Fredrick McBride Smith Gores's records.

John Robert Smith's birth record lists his father as John Smith. His Social Security Application and Claims [Source: Ancestry] shows his father as John R Smith and mother Bernice McBride and birth date and place as Aug. 23, 1931, and Chadbourn, N.C.

[Note: The 1930 Census indicates William L Davis was born in Tennessee. The 1940 Census shows him born in North Carolina but shows that John Roberts Smith was born in Tennessee. John Roberts Smith's birth record verifies that he was born in Chadbourn, N.C. The assumption is a transcription error on the 1940 Census: William L Davis was born in Tennessee and John Roberts Smith was born in Chadbourn.]

John Rivers Smith's WWII Draft Registration of Feb. 16, 1942, shows he was living in Chadbourn, Columbus County, employed by Columbus Manufacturing Company. His wife Bernice Smith was listed as his nearest living relative.

He was described as 5 feet, 7 inches and 148 pounds, with a scar in front of his right ear.

On Nov. 7, 1943, John and Bernice's son, Charles Fredrick Smith, was born. His death certificate from 1993 lists his parents as John Rivers Smith and Bernice Smith Gore, which shows Bernice remarried after John's death. Her obituary found on her Find a Grave page shows there were additional children with John Rivers Smith, as well as stepchildren from her second marriage. A complete list is unavailable.

John and Marion's mother Eliza passed away on July 30, 1943, and is buried in Smith Cemetery. The

specific location of her gravesite is unknown.

John Rivers Smith passed away on Sept. 30, 1956 of stomach cancer in the VA Hospital in Fayetteville. His death certificate lists his father and mother as Robert C. Smith and Eliza Galloway, and his wife as Bernice Smith. He was laid to rest in Smith Cemetery in Southport. The exact location of his gravesite is unknown.

His sister, Marion, passed away in 1969 and was also buried in Smith Cemetery. Her death certificate lists her former occupation as teacher. The exact location of her gravesite is also unknown.

John's sons and wife were laid to rest in Belvue Cemetery in Columbus County, N.C. His son William David Smith passed away after nine days in 1938. Charles Fredrick Smith passed away in 1993. His son, 2nd Lt. John Robert Smith, served in the Korean War and passed away in 2001. His wife, Bernice McBride Smith Gore, passed away in 2012 at age 96.

If you would like to help us honor John Rivers Smith or another Brunswick County WWI veteran, email the Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range at ftcaswellriflerange@gmail.com or go to caswellriflerange.com.

We have been hard at work with Daniel Norris from SlapDash Publishing on the book we plan to offer this year in September titled, "Brunswick County in the Great War: Preserving the 1918 Fort Caswell Rifle Range and the Legacies of the Men and Women Who Served."

The book covers the history and future preservation of the rifle range, and includes profiles and snapshots of all of the courageous men and women from Brunswick County who served in WWI. These soldiers have been featured on the website and in the Beacon for nearly three years. If you can, please help.

Included in the book is the list of Brunswick County WWI veterans. Alongside each name is the name of the generous supporter who honored that veteran with a donation of any amount. As the thermometer on the right side of the website shows, 677 veterans have been honored, which leaves 41 with no recognition. Please consider donating any amount to honor the remaining 41 Brunswick County WWI veterans.

REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after February 17, 1897 and on or before December 31, 1921)

SERIAL NUMBER 784 **John Rivers Smith** ORDER NUMBER 10,682

1. NAME (Print) **John Rivers Smith**

2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print) **Chadbourn Columbus NC**

3. MAILING ADDRESS **Box # 287 Chadbourn NC**

4. TELEPHONE **None** 5. AGE IN YEARS **41** 6. PLACE OF BIRTH **South Port NC**

7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS **Mrs. Bernice Smith**

8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS **Columbus Mfg Co**

9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS **Chadbourn Columbus NC**

I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.

D. S. G. FORM 1 (Revised 3-1-12) **John R. Smith** (Signature)

John R. Smith WWII Draft Registration

I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.

P. M. G. O. FORM NO. 1 (Rev. 1-1-42)

John Rivers Smith (Signature)

Registration signature for John R. Smith