

WWI Profile: Elmer Davis, 1898-1970

By NORMA ECKARD
AND AMY ECKARD
GUEST COLUMNISTS

Elmer Davis was born in Southport, the son of Rev. John Richard Davis and Mary Swain.

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

Like Oliver Banks, Elmer did not become eligible for the draft until the registration of Sept. 12, 1918. His draft registration shows he was living in Southport, employed as a fisherman for a fishery based in Jacksonville, Fla.

Elmer met the physical and educational requirements of the SATC, volunteered and was accepted. Oliver, Elmer and John Rivers Smith served in the SATC at Negro Agricultural and Technical College (now NC A&T State University) in Greensboro. Read the previous posts for details.

Elmer was honorably discharged on Dec. 12, 1918.

The 1920 Census shows that he had returned to Southport to live with his parents and resume fishing.

In 1930, he was living in Fernadina Beach, Fla, with his wife and children, again employed as a fisherman. His employer was a fertilizer plant.

Elmer had returned to Southport when the 1940 Census was taken, living on St. George Street with his family.

He passed away on July 17, 1970. He is described on his death certificate as a retired storekeeper. Details such as this allow more specific searches to be performed. Several references to him were found.

On March 16, 2001, an online State Port Pilot article mentioned Elmer Davis Cafe, located at the corner of St. George and Caswell streets in Southport. This is apparently the cafe of Elmer Davis, WWI veteran. Excerpt shown below:

The [McKenzie's] confectionery was the oldest venture in the heart of what once was Southport's district of black-owned, black-operated businesses, around the intersection of Howe and St. George streets, in the early 1900s.

Twenty-five of them - grocery stores, cafés, dance halls, dry cleaners, a mortuary

Davis		Elmer		4,453,094		1	
(Surname)		(Christian name)		(Army serial number)		*White *Colored.	
Residence: Southport Brunswick NORTH CAROLINA				(Street and house number) (Town or city) (County) (State)			
*Enlisted R. A. A. C. State. *Inducted at Southport NC on Oct 30, 1918				Place of birth: Southport NC Age or date of birth: Feb 13 1898			
Organizations served in, with dates of assignments and transfers: Students Army Trg Corps Greensboro NC							
Grades, with date of appointment: Pvt.							
Engagements:							
Wounds or other injuries received in action: None.							
Served overseas from † none to †, from † to †							
Honorable discharged on demobilization Dec 12/18, 1918							
In view of occupation he was, on date of discharge, reported 0 per cent disabled.							
Remarks:							

Photos contributed

Elmer Davis NC Service Card

and more - thrived into the mid-20th century or later with as much success as their white counterparts.

Today, each is listed by name on a marker the Southport Historical Society installed outside LeClerc's Ladies Boutique, whose building is the former site of McKenzie's Confectionery. The building, and the ice shaver, remains in Adams's possession.

On March 12, 1941, State Port Pilot included this sentence in the Not Exactly News section on page 4: "Elmer Davis, colored fisherman, has opened up a cafe and we can bear witness that his wife's cooking is swell." He was chosen as an air raid warden in Southport during WWII, according to an article in the Dec. 17, 1941, edition of the State Port Pilot.

In Feb. 10, 1943, the State Port Pilot article, "Raise Funds for New Sterilizer," lists Elmer and wife Maverick as donors for the new sterilizer at Doshier Memorial Hospital.

And finally, according to Liz Fuller from the Southport Historical Society, he served on the executive board of the Southport Colored Citizens League in the 1940s, working for justice and equality in the schools.

Elmer was laid to rest in Smith Cemetery in Southport. A small flat marker is located there. However, there is no indication of his military service or his many contributions and leadership in the



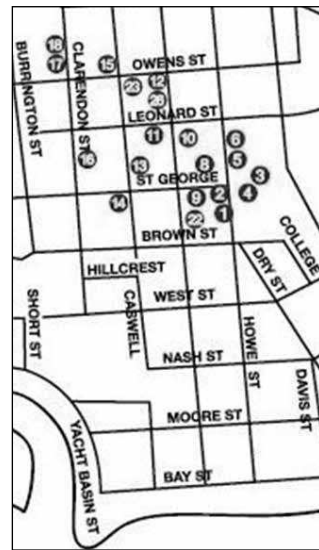
This photo is from 1938, courtesy of the Southport Historical Society. "Menhaden workers playing checkers: Nehi Gore, Elmer Davis, Frank Jackson, Joe Reaves, Joseph Parker, Rapael Parker and Capt. John Erikson."

Southport community.

We have been hard at work with Daniel Norris from Slap-Dash Publishing on the book we plan to offer this year in September: "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.

Our last Brunswick County WWI veterans have been honored with a donation by people in the community. We thank the community for the amazing support! To see the veteran list with donors,



The Southport Historical Society has a map available to locate the black businesses during that time period. A small section is shown here. Elmer Davis Cafe is marked as #14.

go to the donor page on the website.

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

P. M. G. O. Form No. 1 (Red)

Elmer Davis (Signature)

(Overseer)

Elmer Davis WWI Draft Registration