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Descriptive Inventory

**MSS 210 WHEELER, Ernest Eugene, 1921-1944
 & Alma I. (Blancett) Wheeler, 1922-1998**

6 boxes. 46 folders. 1,124 items. 1939-2013.
 Originals and photocopies.

2007.153.4 & SC2019.107.1

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

In 1939 in the small western Kentucky town of Calhoun (McLean County), 18 year-old Ernest Eugene “Gene” Wheeler and 17 year-old Alma “Tiny” Blancett fell in love. They dated from February of that year until Gene left to study for a pre-dentistry degree at Western Kentucky State Teachers College in Bowling Green. They expressed their growing devotion in the many letters that were exchanged until Alma graduated the next year and also entered Western. In 1942 Gene, who was already an ROTC student, enlisted in the United States Army Air Force.

During Eugene’s wartime training, the young couple decided to marry. The wedding took place 12 February 1943 at Maxwell Field, Montgomery, Alabama. They were able to have only three days together before Alma returned to Calhoun to live with her parents and Gene resumed training. When Gene was sent to a Tennessee base closer to home, Alma was able to visit him several times. In April she confirmed her pregnancy and on 6 January 1944 their son James Eugene “Jimbo” Wheeler was born. Despite participating in intensive training, Gene received a seven-day leave to visit his new family. By March 1944 Gene had arrived in England to prepare for his role in the invasion of Europe. In one letter to ten-week-old Jimbo he instructed him to take care of his mother if anything happened to him.

Eugene’s last letter to Alma was dated 2 June 1944. As a member of the 441st Troop Carrier Group, Gene was the co-pilot of a plane charged with dropping paratroopers of the 101st Airborne Division behind German defenses on D-Day. Unfortunately, Gene’s plane was hit by antiaircraft fire. He and the pilot maintained enough altitude to enable the paratroopers to jump then the plane crashed and its crew was lost.

Alma was notified only that her husband was missing and she spent many months not knowing his fate but hoping and praying for his return. On 1 January 1945 she began keeping a diary to record her son’s development to share with Gene when he returned and to recall their happy times before his disappearance. Her 11 June 1945 entry reveals that that was the day she received the official confirmation of his death; however, she continued her diary until the end of the year. Gene’s remains were returned from France to Calhoun in 1948 and a funeral service was held for him 10 February.

James Eugene Wheeler became a dentist, as his father had hoped to become, and eventually traveled to significant sites in England and France in an effort to retrace Gene's military activities.

In 1950 Alma married Dr. George Higginson, Jr., a dentist, and moved to Morganfield, Kentucky where her second son George Hall Higginson was born in 1951. She was an active member of her community, serving as president of the West Central Kentucky Dental Auxiliary, and as trustee of the Henderson District Methodist Church. When Alma, a widow for a second time, died 7 September 1998 at age 76 she was buried in Calhoun between the graves of her two husbands.

COLLECTION

This collection consists chiefly of letters written by Ernest Eugene "Gene" Wheeler to his fiancé and later wife, Alma Blancett of Calhoun. The early letters were written from Bowling Green, Kentucky, where Gene was attending Western Kentucky State Teachers College. The correspondence relates to the couple's courtship and to a lesser extent military life. The letters reflect the constant movement of a service man during training. A small number of letters from Alma to Eugene are included. Beginning in 1945, the correspondence is chiefly related to Alma's search for what happened to her husband and his body. A poignant diary kept by Alma in 1945 reflects the difficulties of a woman who is as yet unsure about the death of her husband. Some later correspondence and material relates to James "Jimbo" Eugene Wheeler's (Gene and Alma's son) search for additional records and answers about his father's service and subsequent death. Box 5, Folder 12 holds the contents of a scrapbook prepared by Alma Wheeler that documents the high school, college and military life of Gene Wheeler.

Envelopes have been kept with the collection at the request of the donor. Letters were placed in chronological order. The diary was placed at the end of the Correspondence. Post-it notes containing annotations by James & Leta Wheeler and historian Hugh Ridenour were photocopied on acid-free paper and placed with the annotated item. All materials were placed in acid-free folders and boxes.

SHELF LIST

BOX 1	Correspondence	119 items	1939-1940
Folder 1	Inventory	1 item	n.d.
Folder 2	Correspondence	13 items	July-Sept. 1939
Folder 3	Correspondence	26 items	Oct. 1939
Folder 4	Correspondence	24 items	Nov. 1939
Folder 5	Correspondence	13 items	Dec. 1939, n.d.

Folder 6	Correspondence	19 items	Jan. 1940
Folder 7	Correspondence	24 items	Feb. 1940
BOX 2	Correspondence	153 items	1940-1950
Folder 1	Correspondence	22 items	March 1940
Folder 2	Correspondence	17 items	April 1940
Folder 3	Correspondence	13 items	May 1940
Folder 4	Correspondence	3 items	Dec. 1940
Folder 5	Correspondence	2 items	Sept. 1940- Oct. 1940
Folder 6	Correspondence	23 items	Aug. 1942- Oct. 1942
Folder 7	Correspondence	31 items	Nov. 1942
Folder 8	Correspondence	32 items	Dec. 1942
Folder 9	Correspondence	10 items	1941-1950
BOX 3	Correspondence	126 items	1943
Folder 1	Correspondence	32 items	Jan. 1943
Folder 2	Correspondence	25 items	Feb. 1943
Folder 3	Correspondence	26 items	Apr. 1943
Folder 4	Correspondence	17 items	May 1943
Folder 5	Correspondence	26 items	June 1943
BOX 4	Correspondence	104 items	1943
Folder 1	Correspondence	20 items	June 1943

Folder 2	Correspondence	27 items	July 1943
Folder 3	Correspondence	19 items	Aug. 1943
Folder 4	Correspondence	17 items	Nov. 1943
Folder 5	Correspondence	21 items	Dec. 1943
BOX 5	Correspondence & Diary	279 items	1944-1947
Folder 1	Correspondence	17 items	Jan. 1944
Folder 2	Correspondence	28 items	Feb. 1944
Folder 3	Correspondence	20 items	Mar. 1944
Folder 4	Correspondence	24 items	Apr. 1944
Folder 5	Correspondence	32 items	May 1944
Folder 6	Correspondence	44 items	June 1944
Folder 7	Correspondence	9 items	Jul.-Dec. 1944
Folder 8	Materials related to the death and military career of Gene Wheeler	18 items	Feb.-Dec. 1945
Folder 9	Materials related to the death and military career of Gene Wheeler	8 items	Jan.-Aug. 1946
Folder 10	Materials related to the death and military career of Gene Wheeler	2 items	May-Jul. 1947
Folder 11	Diary of Alma (Blancett) Wheeler	1 item (183 p.)	Jan.-Dec. 1945
Folder 12	Scrapbook compiled by Alma Wheeler about high school, college, and military life of Ernest Eugene Wheeler	76 item	1938-2013
BOX 6	Miscellaneous	343 items	1943-2006; n.d.
Folder 1	Correspondence	16 items	June 1944

Folder 2	Correspondence	6 items	1944
Folder 3	Correspondence	26 items	n.d.
Folder 4	Wedding congratulations (1943) and baby congratulations (1944)	19 items	1943-1944
Folder 5	Correspondence, chiefly sympathy cards and letters sent to Alma	31 items	1944
Folder 6	Correspondence	2 items	1945
Folder 7	“Deceased Personnel File” for Gene Wheeler and correspondence related to how this information was obtained	173 items	1943-1948; 2002-2006
Folder 8	Miscellaneous: documents, partial pieces of correspondence, receipts, etc.	20 items	1939-1945
Folder 9	Correspondence and ancillary related to Gene Wheeler’s MIA status and eventual reburial	49 items 1991	1942-1950; materials
Folder 10	Article about Gene & Alma’s romance and Gene’s military service and death	1 item	2004

BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD

MSS

210 WHEELER, Ernest Eugene, 1921-1944 1939-2013

Correspondence between Ernest Eugene “Gene” Wheeler and his fiancé and future wife, Alma Blancett, of Calhoun, Kentucky. The Correspondence begins while Wheeler was a student at Western Kentucky State Teachers College and continues when he enters the U.S. Army Air Corps. He was killed when the plane he was piloting crashed on D-Day. Also contains Alma’s 1945 diary.

6 boxes. 47 folders. 1,124 items. Originals and photocopies.

2007.153.4 & SC2019.107.1

SUBJECT ANALYTICS

Airplanes, Military – United States - Photos, 1943 B4,F2
 Bergstorm Field – Austin, Texas – Relating to, 1943 B4,F4
 Camp Forest, Tennessee B2,F6
 Camp Mackall, North Carolina – Relating to, 1944 B5,F1-2
 Courtship B1-B3
 Death, 1944 B6,F5
 Del Valley Army Air Base – Austin, Texas – Relating to, 1943 B4,F4-5
 Diaries, 1945 – Wheeler, Alma (Blancett), 1922-1998 B5,F11
 Embry-Riddle Field – Union City, Tennessee – Relating to, 1943 B3,F3-4
 Fort Bragg, North Carolina – Relating to, 1943 B4,F5-B5,F1
 Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia – Relating to, 1942 B2,F6
 Freeman Field – Seymour, Indiana – Relating to, 1943 B4,F2-3
 Keesler Field – Biloxi, Mississippi – Relating to, 1942 B2,F6-8
 Malden Army Air Field – Malden, Missouri – Relating to, 1943 B3,F5-B4,F1
 Maxwell Field – Montgomery, Alabama – Relating to, 1942 B2,F8-B3,F3
 McLean County – Soldiers from – World War II, 1939-1945
 Military life – World War II, 1939-1945 B2,F6-8; B3-6
 Nashville Army Air Center – Relating to, 1942 B2,F8
 Ridenour, Hugh – Relating to B6,F10
 Sedalia Army Air Field – Warrensburg, Missouri – Relating to, 1943 B4,F5
 Sympathy cards, 1944 B6,F5
 U.S. – Army – Air Corps, 1942-1944 B2,F6-8
 Western Kentucky State Teachers College – Students B1
 Western Kentucky University – Alumni
 Wheeler, Alma I. (Blancett), 1922-1998 – Correspondence, 1942-1944 B1-B6
 Wheeler, Alma I. (Blancett), 1922-1998 – Diary, 1945 B5,F11
 Wheeler, James Eugene, b. 1944 – Relating to B5,F11; B6,F1-2
 World War II, 1939-1945 – Casualties, 1944 B5,F8-10; B6,F5-9
 World War II, 1939-1945 – Letters
 World War II, 1939-1945 – Military life
 World War II, 1939-1945 – Soldiers from – McLean County
 World War II, 1939-1945 – War brides, 1943

SEE and SEE ALSO

Blancett, Alma I., 1922-1998

See:

Wheeler, Alma I. (Blancett), 1922-1998

Higginson, Alma I. (Blancett) Wheeler, 1922-1998

See:

Wheeler, Alma I. (Blancett), 1922-1998

Jeffrey 03/31/2009