State of Tennessee
Department of State
Tennessee State Library and Archives

James R. Mayo
Papers,
1939-1944, bulk 1943-1944

COLLECTION SUMMARY

Creator:

Mayo, James R., 1922-1944

Inclusive Dates:

1939-1944, bulk 1943-1944

Scope & Content:

Consists of 45 pieces of correspondence, including letters, postcards, and V-mail[1], from Robertson County soldier Private First Class James R. Mayo, Co. L, 127th Infantry, 32nd Division, U. S. Army. In addition, there is a blank military Christmas card and an 8 x 10 photograph of Mayo in his dress uniform.

All correspondence but the last, returned letter was written by Mayo to his sister Lorene, who lived in Greenbrier, Robertson County, Tennessee, with her husband J. H. (Henry) Abernathy and their daughter Fairie.

Though Mayo's letters contain no real battle descriptions, his correspondence subtly reflects some significant themes: the grueling and tedious nature of military routine; the sickness and disease that can accompany military service; the sharp contrast between life as a rural farmer and life in the military as well as the adjustment required; the involvement of the military censors and the effect it had on family communication; a life previously guided by farm activities and the importance of family; new experiences such as sunbathing and swimming in New Guinea, as well as socializing with the native peoples; military recreational activities such as baseball, crap games, forays off-post, movies, and visits to town;

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[1] *def.* a system of mail transmission in which a letter is reproduced on photographic microfilm and forwarded in this form to be enlarged on photographic paper for delivery. Origin: *V* abbr. for *victory* (in the World War II slogan *V for victory*)

concern for what was happening stateside with inquiries about the draft and shortages of goods and services; concern for the morality of his service (he writes : “I will haft to say good By, for I can’t tell what I am doing but it isn’t bad” [11-18-43]. He also mentions toward the end of his life being too disgusted to write home); preparing his family for what might come, as he eases them into the realization that he might have to extend his overseas tour after the war ends; and the idea of burial overseas.

Physical Description/Extent:

47 items

Accession/Record Group Number:

Mf. 2023

Language:

English

Permanent Location:

Mf. 2023 (available on microfilm only)

Repository:

Tennessee State Library and Archives, 403 Seventh Avenue North, Nashville, Tennessee, 37243-0312

Administrative/Biographical History

James R. Mayo was born in 1922 in Robertson County, Tennessee. He was a unmarried farmer with a grammar school education when he enlisted in the Army on December 19, 1942, at Ft. Oglethorpe, Georgia. He trained for 13 weeks at Ft. McClellan in Anniston, Alabama, then was sent overseas. In his letters, he mentions being stationed in New Guinea and Australia.

It appears that his unit came into the Pacific Theater just as the 32nd Division (“Red Arrow Division”) had wrapped up operations at Buna, New Guinea, and was transported to Australia for rest, rehabilitation, training, and to receive replacements. Mayo would likely have been involved in Operation Cartwheel, in which Aitape, New Guinea, was secured; this set the stage for Gen. Douglas MacArthur’s promised return to the Philippines. Mayo probably died fighting the Japanese in the Battle of Leyte which launched the Philippines Campaign of 1944-1945. This battle lasted from October 17 to December 31, 1944, and marked MacArthur’s victorious return to the Philippines. James R. Mayo’s death date is recorded as December 6, 1944. He is buried at the Manila American Cemetery at Ft. McKinley, Manila, Philippines. Mayo received the Purple Heart for his service.

Organization/Arrangement of Materials

Correspondence is arranged chronologically regardless of format. If a letter is undated, the postmark has been used for arrangement purposes. Some envelopes are included.

Conditions of Access and Use

Restrictions on Access:

No restrictions.

Restrictions on Use and Reproduction:

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Index Terms

Personal Names:

Mayo, James R., 1922-1944
Abernathy, Lorene Mayo
Abernathy, J. H. (Henry)
Abernathy, Fairie

Corporate Names/Organizations/Government Bodies:

United States. Army. Infantry, 127th. Company L
United States. Army -- Military life -- 20th century

Subjects:

World War, 1939-1945 -- Australia
World War, 1939-1945 -- Campaigns -- New Guinea
World War, 1939-1945 -- Censorship
World War, 1939-1945 -- Moral and ethical aspects
Soldiers -- Recreation -- 20th century
Soldiers -- United States -- Correspondence
Malaria

Geographic Names:

Fort McClellan (Ala.) -- History, Military -- 20th century

Australia -- History, Military -- 20th century
New Guinea (Territory) -- History, Military -- 20th century

Document Types:

Correspondence
Photographs

Acquisition and Appraisal

Provenance and Acquisition:

Loaned for microfilming by Deborah Cosgrove Sawyer of Nashville, Tennessee on April 25, 2012.

Processing and Administrative Information

Preferred Citation:

James R. Mayo Papers, 1939-1944, Tennessee State Library & Archives

Processing Information:

Prepared for microfilming by Darla Brock and Cathi Carmack, May 2012.

Existence and Location of Originals:

Privately held.

Electronic Location and Access:

http://www.tn.gov/tsla/history/manuscripts/findingaids/mf2023.pdf

DETAILED COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

CONTAINER LIST

Contents/Item Title	Date	Box	Folder
Note, to sister Lorene, re: affectionate lines of verse	1-8-1939	1	1
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: Early days in Army; at Ft. Oglethorpe, Georgia for three days; describes routines, getting shots, issued rifle and gas mask; off to Ft. McClellan, Alabama, for 13 weeks of training.	1-1-1943	1	2
Postcard, to sister Lorene, re: written from Ft. McClellan; feeling best he has since he got there; got wristwatch from Daddy for birthday. Postcard illustrated with cartoon featuring black caricature figures.	1-14-1943	1	3
Postcard, to sister Lorene, re: been sick; next week big week on rifle range with all-day training. Postcard illustrated with cartoon of man changing baby diaper: "I Cover the Waterfront."	1-17-1943	1	4
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: sister's move to new home; family news; more descriptions of infantry walking and running challenges; stayed 5 ½ days in hospital last week; had to make up rifle range training; asks about tobacco crop; hasn't gone into town yet - maybe next week; if so, will have photos taken and send home.	1-20-1943	1	5
Postcard, to sister Lorene, re: feeling better, talk of tobacco. Postcard illustrated with American flag and George Washington portrait.	1-30-1943	1	6
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: receipt of her letter; had photos made; description of infantry; says infantry walks everywhere and has to carry heavy equipment; this morning had to carry a 42-lb. gun; didn't go to town last week, the bus was too full; putting in for a pass to "get out of here;" thinking of coming home this week but better stay until he masters the train schedule; has to write several other letters.	2-18-1943	1	7

Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: strain of training; does not go to bed until 10 or 11; went home last week - arrived at 11 and had to leave at 2; others who went on leave got drunk and did not return on time; general inspection took place; has other letters to write.	3-12-1943	1	8
Postcard, to sister Lorene, re: apology for not seeing Lorene when he came home; he is pretty blue. Postcard features image of Post Headquarters and Hospital and Ft. McClellan, Anniston, Alabama	3-19-1943	1	9
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: leaving here, don't write until you hear from me; will take four days or longer to get there; news from home - they have whooping cough.	4-1-1943	1	10
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: features San Francisco return address; mentions his dad sold the truck; others' farming activities; says not much to write about or they will "cut it out."	4-10-1943	1	11
V-mail, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: receipt of photos Lorene sent; may not hear from him for a long time but keep writing. Note: this is the first time his unit designation appears finalized as Co. L, 127th Infantry.	6-21-1943	1	12
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: only received two letters from mother since he has been "over here." Written on Red Cross stationery with quotes printed at bottom.	6-30-1943	1	13
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: family news, hopes others he knows do not have to "come over here."	7-19-1943	1	14
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: getting multiple letters coming all at once; mom sent a photo of herself and dad.	8-7-1943	1	15
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: family news; has more letters to write. Note: missing first page	8-9-1943	1	16
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: letters he has received and people writing regularly to him; most of the guys went to get beer; hope they don't come back drunk like last week.	8-9-1943	1	17
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: disposition of other soldiers from home; time for cutting tobacco.	8-15-1943	1	18
Envelope, no matching letter	8-27-1943	1	19

Letter, to sister Lorene, re: “fine as frog hair”; hopes Fairie won’t forget him and it won’t be long until he returns.	8-29-1943	1	20
V-mail, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: writing when boys are out, otherwise too much racket; letters he has received; thinks it will be quite a while before he gets home; news of another soldier who was sent home to stay; wonders about tobacco crop.	9-4-1943	1	21
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: sister had asked if people “over here” are like us; he writes that yes they are and they are nice; he has been to a private home where he has met local residents; he has learned more of this place than in school; thanks her for picture.	9-13-1943	1	22
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: suspects Lorene wonders why he doesn’t write more; explains that he has to do his washing and clean his rifle during down time; tells her to keep writing; asks about Henry’s crops; it’s hot where he is; nice people, however; will be glad to leave.	10-3-1943	1	23
V-mail, to sister Lorene, re: not feeling too good this week; hopes to be back in the company in a few days; “Gess the army has got about all the boys back home by now”; hopes war doesn’t last much longer.	10-30-1943	1	24
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: getting along fine but still in hospital; asks about home; goes to town about every two weeks; not much to do but good to get out of camp; got package from mom; hot here; got letter from Frances [girlfriend] - she is mad; says she is not that hard to forget and he can find another. Written on Red Cross stationery.	11-3-1943	1	25
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: spent 17 days in hospital; okay now; lost 13 pounds, gained most back; at 175 pounds now; had malaria; asks about weather; says raining and hot here; asks if planning a big Christmas; “I will haft to say good By, for I can’t tell what I am doing but it isn’t bad.”	11-18-1943	1	26
Envelope, no matching letter	11-20-1943	1	27

Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: family questions; says pretty easy for him at this camp; catches a detail every now and then; doesn't expect to stay here long; thinks he will be going back to company before long - then things will be harder.	11-21-1943	1	28
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: having a pretty good time; went to beach yesterday; got 10 letters last week for the first time in a month; mail irregular, especially since hospital stay.	12-7-1943	1	29
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: weather; asks about Lorene's Christmas; says not a bad Christmas for him after all.	12-27-1943	1	30
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: Henry and the tobacco; mom sent clippings about another soldier who "looks [as] if he has had his part of this war."	1-19-1944	1	31
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: never felt better in life; been going to town two or three times a week; enjoying self a lot; has been asked to go to wedding; asks about Lorene's daughter.	1-25-1944	1	32
Envelope, no matching letter	2-6-1944	1	33
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: got package Lorene sent for Christmas; also got one from Mildred; guesses they are drafting a lot at home; will be glad when war is over; things looking better; thinks at least 18 more months of fighting.	2-8-1944	1	34
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: news of other soldiers from home; family news; looks like will return to outfit after all; crap game taking place in tent and making racket.	3-27-1944	1	35
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: family questions; finally got back to outfit, somewhere near New Guinea; each day followed by another, just a little worse; nothing to do but go to a show three times a week; never see a white woman; says there will be some soldiers who will have to stay "on this side of the ocean" after the conflict; he will return home if it is God's will; asks her to say a prayer for him.	4-14-1944	1	36
V-mails (2), with one envelope, to sister Lorene, re: family news; asks questions about photographs; discusses mail; mentions being in Australia.	5-20-1944	1	37

Letter plus fragment, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: mail; "I have been in a place where writing was a thing of a [sic] past but every thing is OK at the present…"; taking all the men in U.S. for the war; censor has cut out location in New Guinea where he is currently stationed; monotonous days; "mosquitos [sic] try to carry you off at night"; fragment: thinks he will get to come home when war ends.	6-12-1944	1	38
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: feet sore; been in a place where impossible to write; may not get another letter for a long while; asks about home; "…is there much of a shortage of any thing except men."	7-16-1944	1	39
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: not where he could write and "may not be able to write again for a while. For I will be going throw [sic] Hell here in New Guinea."	7-21-1944	1	40
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: not feeling good the last week but okay now; asks about Lorene's daughter Fairie; Henry's crops; things are dull.	8-5-1944	1	41
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: asks about Fairie; received lock of Fairie's hair and photos; lots of rain where he is; crops at home dry; "when we was an [sic] the front it rained most every night"; writes "I was lucky enough not to get hit this time and I sure do hope next time I will be just as lucky"; hopes next time "we hit them" there isn't so much trouble; could be a better situation or could be worse; hopes Henry doesn't have to join Army; Henry needed there at home worse; family news.	8-20-1944	1	42
Envelope, no matching V-mail	8-28-1944	1	43
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: reason he hasn't written, not much to write about; doing same things we did in Australia but here taking sun baths and going swimming; Henry's crops; family questions.	9-4-1944	1	44
V-mail, to sister Lorene, re: never felt better, but got the blues pretty bad tonight; been playing baseball today.	9-13-1944	1	45
V-mail, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: thinking of her; in best of health	9-24-1944	1	46
Envelope, no matching letter	9-24-1944	1	47
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: "I have been	10-1-1944	1	48

so disgust [sic] lately that I couldn't write"; best of health; questions about family.			
Letter, with envelope, to sister Lorene, re: family questions; hope war won't last for a long time; remarks on preaching held at home, would like to hear; asks if cold at home; sure would like to get home this winter but thinks it impossible. Note: this is his last letter.	10-29-1944	1	49
Returned letter, presumed to be by sister Lorene's husband J.H. (Henry) Abernathy to James R. Mayo, re: farm news; hurry home to help with farming; wishes James was there to help with hog killing. Signed "J.H.A."	11-14-1944	1	50
Unsigned military Christmas card	Undated	1	51
Photograph, James R. Mayo in dress uniform	Undated	1	52