

Eula (Ula) Foote interview August 14, 2023 – corrections made October 16, 2023

### **Earl E. Pittman, a Merrill's Marauder of WWII**

Eula Foote is a 91-year-old Choctaw who had an older brother in Merrill's Marauders. "My brother, Earl Pittman, was in Merrill's Marauders – a special operations unit of the Army in WWII," said Eula Foote. Earl was the oldest of nine children. "Back then, the government had a program – I guess Roosevelt started it." Eula said Earl's participation in the program helped him be trained for military operations prior to entry in the Army. "They sent Earl from Colorado to Hawaii. He was at Scofield Army Barracks." Eula said Earl had been "out on the town" December 6 and was coming back to the barracks early Sunday morning. "He came onto the air base and the Japanese had already bombed. Soldiers were running wild – running with guns and shooting everything. Earl was there." According to Eula, Earl was a little older than the others, thus was calmer, even in emergencies.

Earl was shipped out to fight. "He was in five large battles and survived every one. Then he was sent to Germany, and was there when the war ended. Earl never was wounded physically, just mentally," said Eula. "You don't go through things like that and keep a good mind. He drank to find relief."

Earl was in the Army from December 1939 to June 5, 1945. He served in Guadalcanal, New Guinea, India, Burma and the Central Pacific. He was awarded Presidential Citation Hq. 5307, Composite Unit Prov. 44, American Defense Ribbon with one Bronze Star and Asiatic-Pacific Ribbon with Four Bronze Stars.

Eula said she could remember Earl talking about the time he spent in the military. "I remember Earl talking about volunteering." She discovered he was in Merrill's Marauders long after his service ended.

Merrill's Marauders were known as "Unit Galahad" and said to be the toughest special forces mission of WWII, organized as the 5307<sup>th</sup> Composite Regiment of the Army from February - August of 1944. Books have been written about the Marauders over the years, and a film about them was released in 1962.

"Nearly 3,000 volunteers were needed for a secretive mission," said Eula. "They were told they were going to do a mission close to Burma – Thailand." She said they were told the mission would be going into the countryside behind the enemy. They were to be foot soldiers, never have any transportation, and work in what clothes that had on until they reached 'far enough inland,' where they would have supply drops - including food, clean clothes and other items.

"They were told they might not make it home," said Eula. "They were in the Himalayan mountains, coming up on Burma. They were walking so they could surprise the enemy. They had to walk, even through water. They walked to successfully secure an airfield that was held by Japanese."

Eula said Merrill's Marauders were foot soldiers, with only a rifle and bayonet for weapons. "They were told, 'If your buddy gets hit - leave them, because you might be next.'" She said she always thought leaving your buddy would be an extremely difficult thing.

One of the cooks kept account of all that happened. He would write down when someone got killed. All this information would get packaged up and carried by little donkeys. One of the

donkeys was killed, and its package was lost, according to Eula. She said it took a lot of research for writers to write the books after the mission.

Earl Pittman was a PFC, and an original member of the Marauders. Pittman passed away November 7, 1992. He had three brothers in the military: Fred, Solomon and Frank (FM). He also had five sisters: Faye, Mary Lou, Josephine, Eula and Clara.

Fred Pittman was in the military as a supply truck driver; Solomon was captured and spent time as a POW. The enemy soldiers kept Solomon and the other prisoners moving around, never taking them to a prison camp. The prisoners weren't given food – they had to scrounge around wherever they were, digging roots and looking for anything edible. Eula said Solomon got lice so bad during his service, that he had scars.

FM, the youngest brother, was killed in action. "He was with three big battles that the Americans did all at the same time," said Eula. "He went in on the French side. After they got there, he was killed. The telegram said he died from wounds in action. He was just 19. Mama got a telegram that Solomon was missing, then got a telegram that FM was dead."

Frank was the rank of Private when he was killed in France. PFC. Fred Pittman served from 1942-1945, in Normandy, Northern France and Central Europe. He was awarded the EAME Medal with three Bronze Stars and the Victory Medal. Pvt. Solomon Pittman served from 1941 to 1945 in Northern France, Rhineland, Ardennes and Central Europe. He was awarded the American Defense Ribbon, Good Conduct Medal and EAME Ribbon with one Silver Service Star. The Choctaw spelling of Eula's name is Ula. "At school, an 'E' was added," she said. All the Pittman sisters attended Carter Seminary. When Eula graduated higher learning at Chilocco in 1951, she had the opportunity to go to the Pentagon as a clerk/typist. She decided to decline the opportunity. Instead, she married and began a family.

The Pittmans also had a cousin named JC (Sonny) Mintz who was a member of Merrill's Marauders. Eula said the family was very proud of the veterans in their family.