

## Rhodes, Eppie: The Home Front's Dispossessed <sup>[1]</sup>

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## Eppie Rhodes: The Home Front's Dispossessed

by David Cecelski. "[Listening to History](#) <sup>[2]</sup>," *News & Observer*. Published 11/13/2005. Copyrighted.  
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I visited with Eppie Rhodes at her home in the Southwest community in [Onslow County](#) <sup>[3]</sup>. Her family lost its land to make way for the construction of [Camp Lejeune](#) <sup>[4]</sup> in 1941. It happened across the country: On the eve of World War II, the federal government uprooted thousands of families in a frantic rush to build new military bases, shipyards and defense plants. The War Department took more than a million acres in Southern states alone. On a rural stretch of the North Carolina coast, it took land for three of the nation's largest military bases, Camp Lejeune, Cherry Point and Camp Davis. The lives of local farming and fishing families were turned forever upside down.

After Pearl Harbor, most of the dispossessed came to see the loss of their land as a necessary wartime sacrifice. Rhodes reminded me, though, that it is never easy to lose a home. She told me, "I hope people remember the love that we had for our home, and for our families and friends, and for the river."



Eppie Rhodes. Photo by Chris Seward, 2005. To request permission to ~~reprint this story~~ purchase a print, please contact the *News & Observer*.

My name is Eppie Dixon Rhodes, and I was born June 22, 1913, down at Verona, North Carolina. There were 14 head of us, but there were 10 of us that lived to be grown, and I had one half-brother. We were down near the river, the New River. We first heard about Camp Lejeune sometime in '41. I don't directly know how that came about, but they told us that we had to move, that they were taking our home for the base. That spring we planted corn and soybeans and we tended to them. They wrote letters in the beginning and told us that we had to get out. And then they went up to Jacksonville and had meetings on it. There wasn't any of them that wanted to move, but we had to do it. We were shocked. We thought it was crazy. We had to be out in September '41. I was expecting at that time, and I told my husband that he could go up there and tell the man in charge that I wasn't leaving until the baby was born. The baby was born the 24th of September. I think there was something scary to a lot of us. We didn't know what we were going to get into. We didn't know what kind of people we were going to be around. We didn't know where we were going to get a place to live.

My brother, he got a car and he would take my husband, Ivey, and carry him around and look for a place. He traveled and traveled and traveled. We had a job finding a place. We didn't want this place, but we couldn't go nowhere else.

They took it hard. Some of them fought about it, but there wasn't anything they could do. My husband, he was bitter against it. He was born there. He had inherited that land from his daddy.

And my mother, well, she didn't ever get over it. The older ones didn't ever get over having to leave home, a good lot of them.

They just tore the houses and all right down. If they needed to go in with a bulldozer, they just ran right over everything.

We had a cemetery down from us. All my family was buried in it. They were dug up and moved up here at Jacksonville, across the road from the city cemetery. They moved the church, the Stones Bay Primitive Baptist Church. There was also the home was the hardest thing for me to leave behind. And then back there, we could go crabbing. I could work in the fields until about 10 o'clock, and then I could take my dishpan and dip net and go to the river and catch crabs and bring it back. At my husband's place, we'd go out in the woods and pick blueberries and dewberries. We'd pick them and can them and make jelly out of them. We had grape vines. We had our apples and peaches. You can't bring any of that with you.

Before the base came, we could visit with our neighbors and our families. See, I could go see my mother most anytime I wanted, because I could take the mule and cart if my husband wasn't using both mules to plow. After they moved to Burroughs, we were just scattered around. I had a cousin that moved up to Mount Olive. And my youngest brother, he had to go to Burgaw to find him a place. We got scattered so far apart, some, you didn't ever see them no more.

My husband got used to it in one sense of the word, but he never did get to where he could farm this place to make anything. It was different land from what we had down home. It would make pretty good corn and soybeans, but there wasn't much. We've been back several times. We go down to Rhodes Point. That's where my husband's place was at. We go down there occasionally, and to Mama's place too. It's just woods now. The Marines practice down there.

She had a wisteria vine when we lived there. The last time we were down there, you couldn't see anything for that wisteria vine, it had gotten so big. There was nothing else left there that you could see.

### Additional information from NCpedia editors at the State Library of North Carolina: :

Eppie Lee Dixon Rhodes lived from June 22, 1913 - November 8, 2014.

#### Subjects:

[Biographies](#) <sup>[5]</sup>

[Personal and oral histories](#) <sup>[6]</sup>

#### Authors:

[Cecelski, David S.](#) <sup>[7]</sup>

#### Origin - location:

[Onslow County](#) <sup>[8]</sup>

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[Listening to History, News and Observer.](#) <sup>[9]</sup>

#### Years:

June 22, 1913 - November 8, 2014

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