

Ohree, Elizabeth: Waiting Is Hard ^[1]

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Elizabeth Ohree: Waiting Is Hard

by David Cecelski. "[Listening to History](#) ^[2]," *News & Observer*. Published 11/11/2001. Copyrighted. Reprinted with permission.

Hoover Jones, a private in the U.S. Army, has been missing in action since the first months of the Korean War in 1950. Last year the Army informed his family that his remains may have been discovered. While the Army conducts DNA tests, the family is hoping that they will finally have a funeral for Hoover.

I visited with Hoover Jones' family in Rocky Mount -- his older brother, Horace, and his sisters, Elizabeth Ohree, Rosa Daniels, Ida Dickens and Thelma Hilliard. Russell, another brother, was in the VA Hospital and couldn't join us.

Elizabeth Ohree told her brother's story. She is a retired public school teacher, elegant and very gracious. She and her brother and sisters and I sat around her kitchen table. They recalled their brother Hoover, but also empathized deeply with all the families today who are mourning loved ones whose bodies they may never see.

In Elizabeth Ohree's words:

Our brother's full name was William Hoover Jones. He was the seventh child of eight. We call him the knee baby, next to the baby. I think all of us know that Hoover was our mother's favorite. (Her brother and sisters nod.) It's strange, I suppose. Our parents were very hard-working people. They spent most of their lives working on the farm in Nash County. Our father owned a mule and a horse, and he gave one-fourth to the person who owned the land. They wanted us really to be successful. We didn't have plenty of nice clothes, but we had plenty to eat and we were better off than most farmers. We really didn't know that we were poor 'til we got out into the world, and maybe we weren't. We had so many good values. We were taught something was always a little different about Hoover. He just stood out from the rest of us. He hugged everybody. He walked with his arm around you and talked and talked, and he had a wonderful sense of humor. Hoover could make a dog laugh. He was just a lively, happy fellow. He was tall, handsome, good-looking. I don't think he had a stomach at all. I don't know how he kept his pants up! All the girls in his class and other classes loved him in high school. (Thelma, Rosa, all the sisters nod.) Rather than walking, Hoover rode our father's beautiful brown horse and white mule. Later he and Horace bought a car together. ("He drove like he was crazy!" Horace adds. "Always doing something with the car that he shouldn't be, going pretty fast.") Our father kept something for all of us to do all the time: turning potato vines or picking green peas or storing food for the winter. We just kind of overlooked Hoover not working. We let him be happy-go-lucky, the free one, and we still feel it was his loss. He was always very neat and stylish and well-dressed. From the time he was a little boy, Hoover always wore a tie. Even with his ragged shirts and overalls, he wore his tie. I think it came from us moving to the Bricks community and attending school. Hoover wanted to look like those professors at the Bricks School. Although he lived on the farm, he saw them all dressed up wearing ties and suits. He also saw people who had graduated from Tuskegee and other colleges all over the United States. Hoover finished at the Swift Creek High School and signed to go into the Army. At that time, there were very few jobs for blacks, so he went into the Army hoping to make a career and a better life. He had worked with the garbage department in Rocky Mount. He went in the Army and took his basic training for six weeks, and then he came home and stayed about a month. He came back in his uniform. We were so proud of him, and he was proud of himself. But I don't think he had any idea when he was going to be missing. The last time I saw him, he was going to 301 highway to catch the bus back to Fort Bragg. We never saw him again. The last letter I got from him, he said he was in a foxhole and he needed a comb. We could tell that he was in danger, and we were worried. The day that we found out about him being missing in Korea, I was teaching at the Spaulding High School in Spring Hope. My mother called me and said that they had learned that Hoover was missing. She had gotten a telegram. Immediately we knew. We never had a funeral. I think we kept hoping. Our mother kept hoping. All of us prayed. I don't think she ever really gave up that hope. I wish she could have lived to have heard from the Army like we did, that his remains might be sent to us. We have gotten a burial site beside my mother and father at the Swift Creek Baptist Church here in Nash County. We plan to give him military honors. We'll have a real funeral, and we will serve food and have just a big affair, a homegoing celebration.

A total of 140,000 Americans died or were wounded in the Korean War. Approximately 8,200 servicemen are missing in action in Korea.

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