

## MSS. Collection #80

**Leah Willis Papers, 1923-1979 [bulk 1943-1948]. ½ box (12 folders), 36 items.**

NOTE: The numbers cited in parentheses, e.g. 1:5, refer the researcher to the Series#:Folder# in which that name/topic will be found.

### INTRODUCTION

This collection consists primarily of materials relating to the military career of dietician Leah Willis. Most materials focus on her time at various army bases in the United States during World War II. Multiple items are official military documents, such as a letter of promotion or basic training certification, while others are more personal, such as photographs of her on leave. Of particular note is a typescript of her diaries that provides an in-depth look into her daily life as a hospital dietician in the army. Researchers interested in women or non-combat roles in the military during World War II may find this collection useful.

**Arrangement:** This collection is organized in five series and arranged within series by document type and/or subject. The series are: **Biography**, 1923-1979, n.d.; **Correspondence**, 1943-1944; **Literary**, 1941-1948, n.d.; **Military**, 1943-1948; and **Photographs**, ca. 1900-1947.

**Provenance:** This collection was donated by Jane Van Hoven in December 1985 and assigned the accession number 1985.167.10. Leah Willis was the donor's maternal aunt.

**Processing:** This collection was organized and the finding aid was prepared by volunteer Leah Nykamp in August 2022.

### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

**Leah Twyne Willis** (1900-1979) was born in Pilot Mountain, North Carolina, and grew up in Winston-Salem. After graduating from the North Carolina College for Women in Greensboro (later The University of North Carolina at Greensboro), she obtained a teaching certificate in home economics in 1923 and taught at public high schools throughout North Carolina. She began training in hospital dietetics in Chicago in 1930, and in 1941 she became a dietician at the station hospital at Camp Davis, North Carolina, planning meals, ordering food, and supervising food preparation. She was later promoted to 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant and then 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant, and she received assignments to hospitals in Georgia, Alabama, Texas, Ohio, and Arkansas. After retiring from the military in 1948, she continued to work as a hospital dietician and eventually returned to North Carolina.

**Biographical Sources:** The sources for this biographical note include materials in the collection, particularly the employment histories and obituary, as well as [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com).

## **SCOPE & CONTENT NOTE**

The types of materials in this collection include correspondence, employment histories, diaries and reminiscences, photographs, certificates, and other printed materials. The highlights are a typescript of Leah Willis' diary, which provides insight into the day-to-day life of a dietician in the military, and typed reminiscences of her experiences during 1941. Also of note are military documents relating to her appointment, promotion, and retirement, as well as detailed records of her employment history that provide an overview of her responsibilities as a hospital dietitian. Researchers interested in the role of women serving domestically in the military during and after World War II may find this collection useful.

## **SERIES DESCRIPTIONS**

### **1. Biography. 3 folders (6 items). 1923-1979, n.d.**

These biographical materials provide information primarily about the working life of Leah Willis. Multiple items relate to her employment history, including a typed list of her military and civilian work experiences, as well as a tax return from 1943 (1:1). Also of interest are her obituary (1:2) and a 1923 teaching certificate authorizing her to teach home economics in the state of North Carolina (1:3).

### **2. Correspondence. 2 folders (2 items). 1943-1944.**

The correspondence includes a letter of recommendation written by the Director of Dietetics at Camp Davis, North Carolina (2:2), as well as a V-mail letter from a female friend who served with the 129<sup>th</sup> General Hospital overseas (2:1).

### **3. Literary. 2 folders (2 items). 1941-1948, n.d.**

These writings describe Willis' time in the military. "Sir Ma'am" is a typescript of her diaries during her service from 1941-1948 (3:2), while typed reminiscences entitled "That Summer's Trance" focus on her experiences specifically during 1941, particularly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor (3:1).

### **4. Military. 3 folders (12 items). 1943-1948.**

This series consists of documents relating to Willis' military service. Of particular note are a letter of promotion and a qualification record (4:1). Also included are a certificate that she received after completing basic training for army nurses and a copy of the certificate of service issued upon her retirement from the military (4:2). The miscellaneous folder contains a certificate for the purchase of shoes and a menu from the 1947 Christmas party at the station hospital at Camp Hood in Texas (4:3).

**5. Photographs. 2 folders (14 items). ca. 1900-1947.**

Most of the photographs date from Willis' time in the military, showing a Mess Department party and her on leave (5:2). Those relating to her civilian life show her as a baby and with her mother, sister, niece, and nephew (5:1).

**FOLDER LISTING**

<b><u>Series</u></b>	<b><u>Folder</u></b>	<b><u>Contents</u></b>	
1	1	Biography	-- Employment History (1943-1945, n.d.)
	2	"	-- Obituary (1979)
	3	"	-- Teaching Certificate (1923)
2	1	Correspondence	-- Personal (ca. 1944)
	2	"	-- Recommendation (1943)
3	1	Literary	-- Reminiscences (n.d.)
	2	"	-- "Sir Ma'am" (1941-1948)
4	1	Military	-- Appointments and Qualifications (1943-1948)
	2	"	-- Certificates (1943-1948)
	3	"	-- Miscellaneous (1945-1947)
5	1	Photographs	-- Civilian (ca. 1900-mid-1940s)
	2	"	-- Military (1943-1947)