

= Moses Hardy =

Moses Hardy (January 6 , 1894 ? December 7 , 2006) was , at age 112 , the last surviving black veteran of World War I and one of the last surviving American veterans of that war . The son of former slaves , Hardy was born in 1894 and lived a religious and farming life until he signed up to serve overseas in World War I in July 1918 . He served in the segregated 805th infantry , which was assigned a variety of manual labor and support tasks . Hardy himself served as a scout , supplying the front line troops when necessary . Though Hardy did experience combat , he was never seriously injured and rarely discussed his experiences concerning the fighting . Instead , he preferred to recount stories about the food , the bravery of the soldiers and the weather in France .

After the war , he took on a variety of jobs including school bus driver , farmer , deacon and cosmetics salesman , the latter of which he performed well past his 100th birthday . He received the Victory Medal , a special medal from the Mississippi National Guard and the French Légion d 'honneur . In 1999 , the Mississippi Legislature adopted a resolution recognizing him as an outstanding citizen of Mississippi . At the time of his death , at the age of 112 , he was recognized as the oldest combat veteran ever , the oldest male ever recorded in Mississippi and the second @-@ oldest man and World War I veteran in the world .

= = Early life = =

Hardy was born in Aberdeen , Mississippi in 1894 . Hardy 's parents , Morris Hardy ? born in the 1840s ? and Nancy Hardy , were former slaves who after the Civil War had purchased 265 acres (1 @.@ 07 km2) of land in Mississippi from a Chickasaw Native American for a dollar . The Hardy family was a deeply religious one , and Moses would later recount that Exodus 20 : 12 , which instructed one to honor their parents , was his favorite Bible passage and one which he lived by . Hardy was married once , to a woman by the name of Fannie Marshall , with whom he would end up having eight children .

= = Military career = =

Hardy 's service in France lasted from July 1918 to July 1919 , and included thirty @-@ nine combat days . As an African American , he served in a segregated army unit , the 805th Pioneer Infantry , which was commanded by white officers . Although the unit 's purpose was to provide support for engineer regiments , it was also an infantry unit that was equipped to fight if necessary . The unit focused mainly of the tasks of stevedores , such as unloading cargo from ships , but also performed other manual labor tasks , such as cooking and organizing burials . Hardy 's outfit was armed solely with rifles , instead of standard @-@ issue machine guns . After the war , Hardy 's division was responsible for cleaning up the battlefields and removing the dead .

Hardy himself admitted to his family that he was " scared to death " when he first arrived overseas , but believed that the soldiers were fed something to make them brave , which he referred to as " brave pills " . After a short time in the military , he claimed that he was not afraid of anything that he experienced from then on . Even in the heat of battle , Hardy professed that he would get " wound up " at times , but never frightened . He recalled many strange experiences with food and drink , such as getting used to drinking green water from canteens and eating hardtacks , which he found to be surprisingly filling . To go with this , there was often little more than small tins of ham or chicken and occasionally coffee to drink and pudding or pie for dessert . Hardy also witnessed many of his friends get killed in action , and relied on his faith in God to get him through the toughest times .

Hardy often acted as a scout who would help bring supplies to troops on the front line . On September 25 , 1918 , he was present at the Meuse River during a mustard gas attack and , at some point during the war , he received an injury to his knee . Hardy rarely spoke about the fighting itself , and preferred to talk about France 's weather when asked about his experiences overseas .

= = Post @-@ World War I = =

Throughout the years , he received the Victory Medal , the Occupational Medal from the Mississippi Army National Guard , an honourable discharge (which he had not received upon leaving the army) and the French Légion d 'honneur . In 1999 , when he was 105 years old , the Mississippi Legislature adopted a resolution recognizing him as an outstanding citizen of Mississippi . At the time , he was known as the oldest living World War I veteran , as Emiliano Mercado del Toro had not yet been discovered . He was interviewed by Treehouse Productions in 2006 as part of their Living History Project , a radio tribute to the last surviving World War I veterans that was hosted by Walter Cronkite . Though he could not speak coherently , his son Haywood Hardy , himself 80 years old at the time , recalled some of the stories that his father had told him .

Hardy did not serve in World War II and instead drove a school bus , farmed and sold linaments and wigs for " Lucky Heart " cosmetics until his retirement . He reportedly continued to go door @-@ to @-@ door for several years past his centenary , even resorting to phone sales when his children hid the keys of his 1972 Chevrolet Caprice . The youngest of his eight children , Jean Dukes , was born in the late 1940s . He also served as a deacon and superintendent of a Sunday School class at Mount Olive Church for over 75 years . His son claimed that , until about four years before he died , his father was healthy enough to drive his car into town every day . Hardy 's longevity was also credited to a daily meal that consisted of cabbage , corn bread , butter milk , potatoes and Dr Pepper , and the fact that he never drank alcohol or smoked in his life . Until a few years before his death , it was claimed that Hardy had never had a seriously ill day in his life and that he never took medicine , as it only made him sick . Hardy lived on his own until 2004 when his legs weakened and he found it almost impossible to walk . He was placed in a rest home , but was still able to feed himself and pass the days watching The Oprah Winfrey Show and The Price Is Right .

At the time of his death , he was the oldest United States combat veteran ever , the oldest male ever recorded in Mississippi and had outlived at least three of his eight children . It was reported that he had several dozen grandchildren and great @-@ grandchildren . He was also ranked as the sixth @-@ oldest living verified person in the world , the second @-@ oldest man and World War I veteran behind only del Toro and the last African American one . Although he suffered from mild dementia in his later years , he was reported to have been completely lucid through his final days and his death was attributed to natural causes .