

**HYMAN SAMUELSON PAPERS**

Mss. 4934

Inventory

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Luana Henderson

Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections  
Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library  
Louisiana State University Libraries  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University

Revised 2009

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**SUMMARY**

<b>Size</b>	3 linear ft.
<b>Geographic Locations</b>	Louisiana (primarily Baton Rouge and New Orleans), New Guinea, Australia, Fort Benning, Ga., Fort Bragg, N.C., Fort Belvoir, Va. West (U.S.), York, N.Y., Chicago, Ill.
<b>Inclusive Dates</b>	1936-2007
<b>Bulk Dates</b>	1936-1944
<b>Languages</b>	English.
<b>Summary</b>	Correspondence, diaries, personal narratives, military records, photographs, and illustrations reflect the student life of a Jewish college student and his experiences as a white United States Army officer of an African American unit during World War II.
<b>Access Restrictions</b>	None.
<b>Copyright</b>	Physical rights and copyright are retained by the LSU Libraries
<b>Citation</b>	Hyman Samuelson Papers, Mss. 4934, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
<b>Stack Location</b>	<b>X:16-18</b>

## **BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL NOTE**

Hyman Samuelson was born to Jewish parents, Rebecca Babetch and Samuel Jacob Samuelson, in Donaldsonville, La., April 11, 1919. He grew up in New Orleans, where his father operated a clothing store. He enrolled at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, in the fall of 1936, graduating in the spring of 1940. He married Dora Reiner of New Orleans, La. on Dec. 28, 1941. She died of cancer Dec. 30, 1944, at the age of 23. They had one son, Ian, born Dec. 1942, who also died prematurely on Christmas Day 1946. Samuelson married his second wife, Louise Anderson, and they had four children. After the war, he left the engineering profession and moved to Austin, Tex., where he established Slax Menswear, a clothing store for men. He retired in 1996.

While at LSU, Samuelson participated in social and academic organizations, including Kappa Nu, a Jewish social fraternity; Sigma Tau Sigma, a professional engineering society; and Tau Beta Pi, a national engineering honor society. He also took part in professional organizations and attended conventions in Louisiana and Jacksonville, Fla. He joined the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) as a freshman and became an officer in the U.S. Army Reserve.

After graduating as an army reservist, he reported for military training in the summer of 1940. In the fall, he entered Tulane University graduate school on a teaching fellowship to pursue a Master of Science degree in civil engineering. During the summer of 1941, Samuelson participated in the engineering and construction of a naval base in the Eighth Naval District at Burrwood, La. In September, he reported for active duty to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 96<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion (Colored). He proceeded to Fort Bragg, N.C., for training, and in February of 1942, his regiment was sent to Port Moresby, New Guinea. In New Guinea, Samuelson took command of Company A in August 1943 and of the entire Regiment in March 1944. He remained in New Guinea until October of 1944 when he transferred back to the U.S. due to his wife's illness. He was reassigned to Fort Belvoir, Va.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT

Papers consist of correspondence, diaries, narratives, military records, photographs, and illustrations that reflect Samuelson's transition from a young Jewish college student to a World War II U.S. Army officer. They offer insight into his intellectual and emotional development. Letters and diaries composed while he attended Louisiana State University relate his experiences as a military cadet and civil engineering student (1936-1940). He reports on all aspects of his life during this period, including his personal relationships with family and friends, participation in social and academic organizations, class assignments, study sessions, religion, personal finances, travel, and social activities. Material written after graduation relates to Samuelson's work at the naval base at Burrwood, La., and his military training, but concentrates primarily on his experiences while serving in the South Pacific. It documents his activities, events relationships and reveals the difficulties he encountered with military bureaucracy, troop morale, discipline, engineering projects, and disease. Throughout the papers, Samuelson discusses his personal growth, goals, and his interpersonal relationships, particularly with Dora Reiner, who later became his wife.

Excerpts from Samuelson's wartime papers were published by his niece, historian Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, in her book, *Love, War, and the 96<sup>th</sup> Engineers (Colored)* (University of Illinois Press, 1995). Hall's notes and compilation of diary entries, photographs, and illustrations assembled in preparation for the book are also present.

**Note:** The diaries were received in loose-leaf binders. For preservation, the pages were removed from the binders and housed in archival folders. Some photographs interleaved in the diary were removed to appropriate housing.

**LIST OF SUB-GROUPS, SERIES, AND SUBSERIES**

- Series I.**                   **Correspondence, 1937-1944, 1992, 1995.**
- Series II.**                   **Writings, 1936-1945, ca. 1990-1995.**
- Subseries 1.**               **Student diaries, 1936-1940.**
- Subseries 2.**               **World War II diaries, 1942-1944.**
- Subseries 3.**               **World War II narratives, 1942-1944.**
- Subseries 4.**               **Gwendolyn Midlo Hall compilation, 1941-1945, ca. 1990-1995.**
- Series III.**                 **Military records, 1942-1945, undated.**
- Series IV.**                 **Printed items and graphic material, ca. 1939-1945, 2007.**

## **SERIES DESCRIPTIONS**

### **Series I. Correspondence, 1937-1944, 1992, 1995.**

Correspondence consists almost entirely of Hyman Samuelson's letters to Dora Reiner Samuelson. Early letters reflect Samuelson's experiences as civil engineering student and a cadet in the Reserve Officer Training Corps at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, La. (1937-May 1940). Letters give an account of his social activities, studies, and his ROTC training. He also writes of his experiences hitchhiking to Washington D. C. (July 22, 1939) and New York (July 28, 1939).

Letters after graduation describe his military training at Camp Beauregard, Alexandria, La., as an officer in the U.S. Army Reserve (July-Aug. 1940), and his participation in a survey camp as a graduate student in the engineering program at Tulane University (June 1941). Samuelson also writes of his experience as an engineer at the Eighth Naval District naval base at Burrwood, La. (July-Sept. 1941).

Correspondence written during Samuelson's military service reflects his relationship with Dora, military life, family matters, social activities, and news of family members and friends (Sept. 27, 1941-Dec. 1944). These letters begin at Fort Bragg, N.C. when he was a junior officer assigned to the 96<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion (Colored), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. He describes fellow officers, enlisted men, his duties, and training maneuvers. In his observation of African American soldiers, he notes that they lack proper education and adequate socialization. He considers their pay to be low and their sleeping accommodations to be poor. He also expresses frustration in his inability to offer adequate defense to the soldiers he represents in court martial cases (Oct. 3, 8, 31, 1941) and he remarks that base personnel received the news of the war with apathy (Dec. 9, 1941). Some letters also include drawings of the camp and his living arrangements. Others include vivid descriptions of his dreams and nightmares.

In early 1942, he recounts traveling with a naval convoy to Australia and the welcoming reception of the civilian population (Mar.-Apr. 4, 1942). Because of wartime censorship, early letters written from New Guinea do not reveal his location or engineering projects. He writes primarily about music, literature, leisure and social activities, family matters, and friends. He also reports on legal charges against African American soldiers (July-Aug. 1942; May 6, 1943), and one soldier's death (Aug. 29, 1942). He also expresses his view on the war (July-Sept. 1942, Dec. 12, 1943).

When allowed to reveal his location, Samuelson describes New Guinea and its native people and culture (Aug. 15, 1942, Aug. 7, 1943, Aug. 9, 1944). He talks about the missionaries who serve there (June 2, 1943), and the use of native labor (Apr. 1943). He reports that he contracted malaria (May 1943) and tropical ulcers on his leg (Nov. 3, 1943), and he describes a fellow officer's severe skin infection (June-July 1943). He remarks on soldiers suffering from stress (Sept. 24, 1943). He also comments on the

limited education of his African American troops (May 29, 1944). In August of 1944, he expresses great concern regarding his wife's illness, and he begins the transfer process to return to the United States.

Samuelson transferred to Fort Belvoir, Virginia, in November of 1944, where he attended engineering classes. His letters discuss classes, training, personal activities, family matters, and Dora's health (Nov.-Dec. 1944). He also gives instructions for using gasoline coupons (Dec. 7, 1944), and he remarks on the progress of the war against the Germans (Dec. 15, 1944). Dora's letters relate her personal activities, family matters, news of family members and friends, and updates on her health.

Later correspondence relates to Gwendolyn Midlo Hall's research for her publication *Love, War, and the 96<sup>th</sup> Engineers (Colored)* (1995).

## **Series II. Writings, 1936-1944, ca. 1990-1995.**

### **Subseries 1. Student diaries, 1936-1940, undated.**

Samuelson begins his student diaries by describing initiation activities and his daily duties as a cadet (1936-1937). He describes rifle training (Mar.-Apr. 1937), and later discusses his responsibilities as an ROTC officer (Sept.-Oct. 1938; Jan. 18, Oct. 25, 1939; Mar. 6, 11, May 22, 1940). He gives an account of his training in military engineering, weapons use, chemical warfare, and KP duty during his six-week assignment at Fort Benning, Ga. (June 11-July 19, 1939). Samuelson also expresses concern over changes in the LSU ROTC program, which reflect the changes in the U. S. armed services (Sept. 11, 19, 1939). Additionally, he comments on a letter sent to the acting president of LSU from the president of Tulane University suggesting that the LSU cadet corps not attend a football game in New Orleans because fighting might erupt (Nov. 19, 1939).

Entries on travel and recreational activities describe hitchhiking between Baton Rouge and New Orleans for weekend visits; Mardi Gras parades (Feb. 4, 1937, Feb. 20, 1939); summer picnics and swimming at Lake Pontchartrain, Bayou St. John, and Covington, La.; and visiting family in Covington. They tell of traveling by train with other cadets to Birmingham, Ala. (Nov. 13, 1936) and Knoxville, Tenn. (Oct. 28, 1938) for LSU football games and a trip to the Mississippi Gulf Coast with friends (Dec. 26-29, 1936). Entries detail a family trip across country by car (July 1937), describing the Badlands and effects of drought in South Dakota (July 8), the progress on the carving of Mount Rushmore (July 9), Yellowstone National Park (July 11), Salt Lake and Salt Lake City, Utah (July 13, 14), Boulder Dam (July 15), Los Angeles, Palm Springs, low price for fresh fruit in Calif. (July 16, 17), and the deserts of The West. Samuelson gives a detailed description, with drawings, of the levee and swamp along the Mississippi River near LSU (Apr. 25, 1937), and the landscape surrounding Bogue Falaya (July 26, 1937) and Little Bogue Falaya near Covington, La., (July 6, 1938). Samuelson also writes of spending time shopping and attending the movie theaters in downtown Baton Rouge.



Samuelson tells of muddy road conditions and working in the cotton fields while en route to Fort Benning, Ga. (June 11, 1939). He recounts his experiences hitchhiking and sightseeing (July-Aug. 1939) in Washington D. C. (July 21-22, 1939), New York City, the New York World's Fair (July 23-Aug. 2, 1939), and to visit family in Chicago (Aug. 6-11, 1939).

Entries regarding World War II include references to the Jewish situation in Germany (Feb. 26, 1939), Adolph Hitler (May 30, Oct. 12, 1939), the British ambassador to Germany (Aug. 27, 31, 1939), attack on Poland and the state of British and French forces (Sept. 3, 4, 6 1939). Entries give updates on the developments in Poland, France, and Britain (Sept. 12, 20, 1939). Samuelson reports on the assassination of the Prime Minister of Romania and Nazi supporters causing trouble (Sept. 21, 1939). He discusses Poland's collapse, Germany's invasion, and Russia's troops crossing into Poland, and expresses the need for U. S. participation in the war and the repeal of the Neutrality Act (Sept. 17, 1939). He also reports that the British refused Hitler's peace proposal, and states that the war news is contradictory with both sides claiming victories (Oct. 16, 1939). Other entries pertain to the sinking of a British battleship (Oct. 14, 1939), a cessation in fighting in the Finland-Russian war (Mar., 13, 1940), and Germany's invasion of Denmark, with the probable invasion of Norway (Apr. 8, 1940). Samuelson gives brief descriptions of Germany's military actions and comments on Germany's success in Northern Europe (Apr. 30, May 2, 11, 1940). He comments on a speech by Roosevelt calling for increased national security, and voices strong criticism of Italy for allying with Germany (May 26, 1940).

There are few references to African Americans (June 21, 1937; May 11, Nov. 27, 1938; May 30, June 11, July 14, Aug. 6, 1939). However, Samuelson does describe the difficulty in finding a cook for the family while vacationing in Covington (June 17, 1937). Of particular interest is an entry concerning an African American family at Elm Hall sugar plantation. By describing their living conditions and circumstances, the passage illustrates the extreme poverty of the plantation worker and his family (Aug. 16, 1937). Samuelson also comments on Joe Louis' boxing matches (June 22, Aug. 29, 1937), Armstrong-Ambers match, and the participation of African Americans in sports (Aug. 17, 1938). Notations relating to economic conditions include his observations on a shortage of money among people (Mar. 3, 1937); hardship and worry seen in the faces of WPA workers (June 9, 1937); and comments by a stranger on the objectives of the sulfur industry and labor problems (June 4, 1939).

Personal religious views are expressed at length (Mar. 17, Apr. 18, 1937) and referred to throughout the diaries. He also mentions religious observances (Mar. 1937; Sept. 6-7, 14, 1937; Sept. 26, Oct. 5, 1938; Sept. 24, 1939). Other references to Judaism include a conversation with an anti-Semitic complaining that American Jews were pushing for war with Germany (Dec. 22, 1938); mention of the Jewish situation in Germany (Feb. 26, 1939); Colonel Middleton's speech to Jewish students (Mar. 26, 1939), and remarks made by others that Samuelson would not receive a Tulane University fellowship because he was a Jew (June 1, 1940).

Passages concerning prominent individuals tell of Gov. Richard Leche's announcement to send the entire cadet corps to the LSU/Auburn game and possibly the Rose Bowl (Oct. 10, 1936), Eleanor Roosevelt's speech (Mar. 6, 1937), and Col. Middleton's speeches on leadership (Oct. 26, 1937) and the American way of life (Mar. 26, 1939). He expresses his cynicism on Louisiana politics at the election of Governor Samuel Houston Jones (Feb. 21, 1940), and mentions dancing with Russell Long's date (Mar. 25, 1938).

Diaries also record opening ceremonies for the new LSU golf course (Feb. 17, 1937), dedication of the new flag pole (Feb. 20, 1937), repairs made on "sand boils" between the swollen Mississippi River and the LSU stadium (Feb. 18, 1937), debris left by Mississippi River floodwaters (Apr. 20, 1937), a tropical storm (Aug. 14, 1938), and snow in Baton Rouge and New Orleans (Jan. 21-23, 1941). Samuelson mentions inoculations for typhoid and small pox (Sept. 23, Oct. 7, 1936) and a severe reaction to a second injection (Sept. 29, 30, 1936). He describes his flu symptoms (Feb. 28-29, Apr. 14-16, 1939), and hives (Dec. 30-31, 1938). Samuelson exhibits his interest in astronomy by detailing the constellations in the night sky (Sept. 1938 – Apr. 1940) and the position of the planets (Feb. 25, Mar. 15, 1940). Other entries concern the deaths of his young niece, Lita (Feb. 19., Oct. 13, 1938) and his cousin Mitchell (Apr. 30, 1939); disturbing nightmares (Nov. 18, 1938, Mar. 18, 1939); and witnessing a murder/suicide in Winnsboro, La. (Dec. 22, 1938). Diaries end with Samuelson discussing prospects for employment, interviews, and graduate studies (Apr.-May 1940).

Diaries also contain illustrations, poetry, newspaper clippings [photocopies], photographs, and transcriptions of conversations and letters.

**Subseries 2. World War II diaries, 1942-1944.**

Diaries reflect Hyman Samuelson's World War II experiences by documenting activities, events, and relationships that occupied him during his service in the South Pacific. They reveal the difficulties he encountered with military bureaucracy, troop morale, discipline, engineering projects, and tropical diseases. Entries offer insight into the operations of an engineering battalion, the operations of an African American unit, leisure activities, camp life, and the people and landscape of New Guinea. He also expresses his personal opinions on fellow officers, women, the Japanese, the lack of a work ethic among military personnel, and the progress of the war in both Europe and the Pacific. In addition, Samuelson mentions a severe storm, probably Typhoon Helen, which killed several people, and destroyed buildings and structures (Apr. 29-30, 1944). Diaries contain several illustrations and transcriptions of conversations.

He recounts the trip aboard the naval transport ship, Santa Clara, from New York to New Guinea. He describes his on board duties as a junior officer, leisure activities, and the effect of the long trip on the officers (Feb.-Apr. 1942).

Diaries reflect the difficulties Samuelson faced with building projects, including the construction of roads, reservoirs (Oct. 27-Dec. 1942), a runway (Mar. -Apr. 1943), the construction of an island causeway to Tatana Island, and dock at Port Moresby (July-

Sept. 1943). He tells of work impeded by weather, the lackadaisical attitude of construction crews, poor discipline, changes made to projects, and problems in acquiring equipment and building materials. He refers to the use of native laborers (June 23, July 11, 1942, Oct. 4-18, Apr. 1943), whom he considers forced labor (Apr. 20, 1943). Entries also describe a secret expedition to Abau to determine the feasibility of constructing a road for transporting troops and equipment inland. He tells of work getting underway, and problems with the terrain, illness, and laborers. Samuelson later complains when senior officers order him to abandon the project (Sept.-Oct.1942). He relates moving his company from Port Moresby to Milne Bay (Dec. 25, 1943-Jan 1944). In these entries, he describes meetings with senior officers, military red tape, the beautiful scenery, and rough terrain.

A large portion of the diaries pertains to social events, and the relationships between officers and nurses. Samuelson provides an account of leisure activities in camp with fellow officers, movies and books, parties, alcohol consumption, and his involvement with women. He expresses his opinion of women in general and as well as their role in the armed forces (May 29, June 2, 23, 30, 1943).

Samuelson reveals his concerns regarding African American troops with entries on racial bias, discipline, and morale. He addresses these issues in detail when describing his own style of command (Aug.-Dec. 1943). He objects to the treatment of African American troops and strongly denounces racism (Oct. 11, 1943). However, he does agree when they are denied furloughs due to conflicts with white soldiers (Apr. 17, 1942, Mar. 16, June 23, July 13, Nov. 18, 1943). He complains about a senior officer who lacks an understanding of the African American spirit (Feb. 10, 1943), and he cites rumors that enlisted men harbor a strong dislike of the officers (July 13, 1943). He mentions military infractions committed by soldiers and court martial hearings (July 21, 25, Aug. 10, 1942, Mar. 13-14, 1944). Samuelson comments on an increase in homosexual behavior among the troops (Dec. 19, 1942), and the prosecution of such a case (Mar. 12, 1944). An accusation against African American soldiers in the shooting death of an Australian officer greatly disturbs him (June 23, 1943). Samuelson also repeatedly comments on the morale of officers and enlisted men. He discusses a soldier's self-inflicted wound to the hand (Oct. 7, 1943), and he describes the mental breakdown of a sergeant (Mar. 12-14, 1944). He also details the circumstances surrounding the death of a senior officer from a self-inflicted gunshot (Nov. 15-Dec. 3, 1943).

Throughout his diaries, Samuelson comments on Japanese military campaigns. He witnesses Japanese aerial bombings and mentions the Solomon Islands campaign (Aug.-Sept. 1942), and the offensive against the Japanese at Lae (Sept. 5, 10, 1943). He tells of natives killing Japanese captives (Dec. 25, 1943). He recounts operations at Sansapor and Japanese resistance at Sarmi (Aug. 19, 1944). Samuelson considers the possible use of chemical weapons by the Japanese (Jan. 10, 1943), and quotes from a senior officer's lecture on the probability of chemical warfare (Apr. 26, 1943). He also complains about the lack of security and goes on to describe a scenario in which the enemy takes an American airfield (Apr. 8, 1943).

Tropical diseases continuously affected troops in the Tropics. Several entries report on soldiers suffering from malaria. Samuelson tells of his bouts with dengue fever (June 22, 1942), malaria (July 11, 1942, May, Sept. 19, 1943), leg ulcers (Oct. 16, 17, 1942), and prolonged fever and weakness (Jan-Feb. 1943). He remarks on native laborers becoming weak and ill (Sept. 1942). He mentions the high death count from typhus among natives (Oct. 7, 1943), high rate of typhus cases in Sansapor (July 19, 1944), and the severity of a fellow officer's skin infection (May-July 1943).

In two separate diaries, Samuelson writes about traveling to Abau, New Guinea and Sidney, Australia. He recounts a one-month expedition to Abau to explore trails through the remote wilderness in search of a viable transport route (Sept. 18,-Oct. 19, 26 1942). He describes the difficult terrain, problems with the native language and laborers. He later disagrees with the Army's decision to abandon the road project. He comments on the ulcers on his legs and necessary medical treatment. Additionally, entries refer to natives killing Japanese pilots, and the unofficial policy of killing enemy captives rather than taking them prisoners (Sept. 20, 1942). He also reports on the rescue and evacuation of a seriously ill correspondent who had been in the wilderness for a month (Sept. 22, 1942). The diary describing his two-week furlough in Sidney contains photographs of street scenes, buildings, and animals native to Australia (Nov. 14-29, 1942).

### **Subseries 3. World War II narratives, 1942-1944.**

Narratives reflect Samuelson's experiences with the people, events, and places during his military tour in New Guinea. They contain character sketches and recount conversations with fellow officers, enlisted men, and women with whom he interacted on professional and social level. He recounts activities and conversations, which relate to camp operations, work projects, and social situations. Narratives also contain a description of his transport from New York to New Guinea and depictions of localities in Australia and New Guinea.

### **Subseries 4. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall compilation, 1941-1944, ca. 1990-1995, undated.**

A compilation of diary entries, photographs and illustrations that were assembled by Gwendolyn Midlo Hall in preparation for her book, *Love, War, and the 96<sup>th</sup> Engineers (Colored)* (1995). The author's mockup and notes accompany several images. Family snapshots are of Samuelson, Dora, family and friends. Also included is an autobiographical sketch of Hyman Samuelson (undated).

### **Series III. Military records, 1942-1945, undated.**

Military records reflect the duties and responsibilities Samuelson assumed as the commander of the 96<sup>th</sup> Engineers Corps, Company A. They relate to engineering projects, work assignments, supplies, equipment, troop discipline, and Samuelson's transfer back to the United States in September of 1944.

**Series IV. Printed items and graphic material, ca. 1939-1945, 2007, undated.**

Series contains photographs and illustrations created primarily during Samuelson's military service in New Guinea. The majority of photographs show Samuelson in uniform. Most other individuals are unidentified except for some family members and friends. A group photograph identifies individuals at a construction site near the Mississippi River Bridge (Mar. 18, 1940). Photographs depict roads, construction sites, equipment, military officers, African American military personnel, and the native population. Illustrations include a hydrographic survey of a floating pier (Sept. 15, 1942), the native population, Samuelson's living quarters, and a layout of the camp. In addition, illustrations contain maps of the South Pacific and New Guinea. Printed items are comprised of a LSU program for an address delivered by Eleanor Roosevelt (Mar. 6, 1937), and newspaper clippings of Samuelson with Dora (Dec. 1941) and Louise (Jan. 28, 2007)

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CONTAINER LIST

<u>Stack Location</u>	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folders</u>	<u>Contents</u>
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			Subseries 1. Student diaries 1936-1940.
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<b>X:18</b>	5	12-18	<b>Series III. Military records, 1942-1945, undated.</b>
<b>X:18</b>	5	19-23	<b>Series IV. Printed items and graphic material, ca. 1939-1945, 2007.</b>