

Cpl. Carl Chester Wunderlich (13090380)



Recently we received an email from someone who acquired an 8th Air Force Radio Operators uniform with the name Carl C. Wunderlich, 13090380 written in it. They asked if we had any information on him and of course we had more than a bit of information regarding Carl Wunderlich. Below is Carl's story.



Carl Chester Wunderlich was born May 19th, 1923, in Lebanon County, Pennsylvania to John William (b.1877) and Mamie Mengel (b.1883) Wunderlich. He had three brothers, Edward James (b.1907), John Mengel (b.1915), and Lester Leroy (b.1918) and three sisters Mabel Elizabeth (b.1904), Doris E (b.1908), and Irene Ethel (b.1911).



(Carl's parents)

Carl's parents were both born in Pennsylvania although John's father was originally from Germany. They married December 24th, 1902, in Lebanon, Pennsylvania and set home there. John worked as a machinist in the steel works.

Carl was only 3 years old when his mother passed away April 9th, 1926. John continued to bring his children up at their family home and in 1930, the census shows that John was still working as a machinist at the steel works and his eldest son, Edward, had joined him. Mabel was also working as a secretary for a Lawyer. In 1931 Carl's sister, Irene married Richard H. Noll. Tragically Carl lost his father September 29th, 1932. Carl was now an orphan before his 10th birthday. Carl and his brother Lester went to live with Irene.

In 1940 Carl was 16 years old and living with his sister Irene and her family. Lester was also living there. Carl was working as a news carrier for Zweiers Store and Lester was a painter.

Carl graduated from Lebanon high School in 1941 and enlisted June 11th, 1942. He put his occupation down as architect and was given service number 13090380.

"After Pearl Harbor, all the young fellows were starting to enlist. After eating a hand of bananas to come up to Army Air Corps weight, I headed to Lancaster to enlist and I passed" Carl recalled *"I soon found myself with a couple of other guys*



on a train to Harrisburg. There on a second floor off Market Street a whole room full of soon-to-be GIs took the oath of allegiance. After that we were then told to strip. There in a room full of naked men I had my first cough test.”

Carl boarded a waiting bus which took him to the New Cumberland Army Depot.

“We soon got used to the new khakis and the fatigues and liked the idea of being able to buy cheap cigarettes and 3.2 (percent) beer, even if we were underage. The beer was weak and there was little danger of getting drunk.”

Carl was at New Cumberland for a month before being transferred to Keesler Field, Biloxi, Mississippi for basic training. He endured shots, KP (kitchen) duty, drills, and hot marches under the Mississippi sun. He also undertook training at Scott Field, Illinois.



Carl served at Boca Raton, Florida for advanced training for a month and then transferred to Jefferson Barracks, Mo for overseas training. After a month of training at Jefferson Barracks, Carl was given leave. When he returned he found out that the group he had trained with had been shipped out.

He found himself on the list to go to Salamis, California along with another Private and a Sergeant who had just come back from Pearl Harbor. *“I don’t know how the Sergeant managed it but we had private compartments from St Louis to San Francisco. What a life! The porter could not do enough for us.”*

Carl had served a month at Salinas, California when he learned that the military needed radio operators and mechanics for the newly formed 58th Station Complement to get the airfield at Seething ready. He was sent to Columbus, Indiana to join them and while there he was promoted to Corporal. His unit then headed to Camp Patrick Henry in Virginia.

On September 5th, 1943, the 58th Station Complement boarded the General John Pope and sailed unescorted across the Atlantic Ocean. Because of a previous boiler failure, the ship was delayed in leaving as it awaited repairs, so it missed the convoy. *“When the sea gulls turned back, we knew we were on our own. The captain took a far northern route to get away from the German subs.”*



Subsequently it was to endure the trip alone, zigzagging to avoid becoming a victim of the German U-boats that were known to be about. Many men on board were seasick and things didn’t get better when the ship encountered a severe storm on the third day.

“We were supposed to sleep out on deck every other night, but after the third day we hit a terrific storm. So everyone had to be below. The ship would heave out of the water and you could hear the propeller blades churning like an egg beater and then when she would hit the water and then she would slide sideways, and a bunch of water would come down and as a result, we were walking in water up to our knees. The toilets were not working but who cared, we were all afraid we were going to die!”

“Some kind soul brought me back an orange from the mess hall and I never tasted anything so good and best of all it stayed down. The storm passed and we were allowed out on the deck. The Chaplain told us that the storm was just five miles short of a hurricane and we should count our blessings.”

The ship reached the Scottish port of Greenock 8 days later on September 13th, 1943. After disembarking, the unit travelled down the country by train then truck to Seething. *“How great it was to see the green shores of Greenock, Scotland and to sail into the firth of Clyde to our docking place and into the waiting trains that would take us to Norwich, England. The Army trucks were waiting to take us to Seething which would be our home for the next three years.”* When they arrived, they were greeted by Lt Col V B Cagle and his team of men who had previously been transferred there on September 1st, 1943 from Station 114, Hethel, to aid in establishing the Headquarters for the Bomb Group.

“R.A.F. Personnel had charge of the field, and it was they who cooked for us during those early months. I shall never forget the delicious Yorkshire pudding and the darker coloured bread with orange marmalade. They even talked us coffee drinkers into the habit of the tea wagon and it’s baked goodies (it really didn’t take much talking on their part) and after 40 years of trying I still can’t make tea taste as good as that. When our cooks took over we had to be content with green powdered eggs and s---- the shingle!”



The sight that greeted the men was of an airfield far from being finished and ready for the still training 448th Bomb Group. That first night there was an air raid over Norwich, and a lone German plane decided to strafe the airfield to welcome the 58th to war.

“We were living in the small group of Quonset huts (about 6) each holding about 12 men. It wasn’t long after we arrived that we experienced our first German strafing. No one was hurt, but it did shake us up a bit. It didn’t take us long to recognize that peculiar throb of the German aircraft.”

Carl began his job as a radio operator and mechanic in the Control Tower. He and a friend, Charlie Day made cables that connected the radios that were under the operators table. *“We connected the mikes and found everything was OK. We then helped put in the dome runway lights on all three runways....There was a hanger to the left and rear of the Control Tower and in between the hanger and the tower there was a shed which was used to recharge the batteries used for the runway lights..... There were steps that went up to the roof to reach that small glass shed which was used as a radio extension every now and again during the summer months. “*



Finally the 448th Bomb Group arrived *“In the beginning the losses were heavy. Sometimes a third of the aircraft did not return. This was due to the fact that our fighter planes could only go so far and then have to turn back for fear of running out of gas. This made our bombers sitting ducks for the German fighters. That situation changed with the arrival of the P-51 mustang. They had fuel tanks under the wings that they could use first.”*

Over the twenty-two months that Carl was stationed at Seething he gained a lot of memories. Some fond, some not.....

“I am reminded of the time a British Lancaster made an emergency landing. Before I came on duty, I wanted to see what it was like inside. I crawled up the ladder and I only took a quick look, because even though they had removed the body there was enough there to realize the poor tail gunner never made it.”

“We spent evenings at the “Mermaid” (we Americans had a much more vulgar name for it). I shall always remember Mrs. Barker (Landlady) calling “Time, ladies and gentlemen, please”, and “Big Mac” playing the piano in the other room. You could name it and he could play it while the rest of us sang our heads off while drinking our half and half. We could not believe that Mac transferred to the 448th and was lost in a raid over Germany on his first mission. He was one of ours (the 58th) and so we all felt very bad about it. The piano remained silent and no longer did the room hold the sound of singing voices.”

“I can recall going to several dances in a hall down the road from the “Mermaid”. I think the most popular number was called “Polly Wolly D”. On second thought, maybe I should have just described it as “put your right foot in, put your right foot out.”

“We could go into Norwich about twenty miles west and the big bar there was Backs, that opened once in the morning, once in the afternoon and once in the evening, at each opening they would start out with bourbon, scotch and finally gin. It did not take very long for me that my system was not meant for this concoction and I went back to the English half and half beer.”

“There were three bad accidents on the field, the first one was a truck doing some work on the field and it was hit by the whirling props of a B24, resulting in dead and injured, they were from our outfit one lived in our barracks by the name of Lazarus. Lazarus would not rise again and it took us some time to pass his empty bunk without a sick feeling.

The second one was one time the German fighters followed our aircraft coming back from a mission. They were making the final approach when they were shot up. We had five aircraft piled up on the runway and had to quickly change runways while the guns around the airfield opened up and scared the fighters away, I do not know the casualty rate.

The third one was the worst when one of the B24's bound for a mission could not gain air speed it went down right after take-off and we could hear at the tower “get me out” but the loaded fuel tanks caught fire and there was a loud explosion and a large black cloud. The medics picked up body parts from one end of the runway to the end; they were buried in the American Cemetery at Cambridge.”

“The most interesting thing for me was seeing all the bombers flying over for D-Day. I was confined to the air base. We were given a letter from General Eisenhower telling us what was going to happen. It was a feeling of elation because we'd seen all those bombers flying and we knew the second front had started.”

Looking back, it must have seemed that we noisy Americans were taking over your country and there didn't seem much you could do about it. However, I have come to realize that by the time we arrived, you had gone through the worst of it all and had won your battle. I shall always admire the British people for their courage and determination through it all.”

When the war was over, the men celebrated. After the celebration their next thoughts were of home. Both ground and air crews prepared for their journey home, closing the airfield for the caretakers. Orders were soon received and in a short time Carl left the UK on the liner, ‘Queen Mary’, leaving

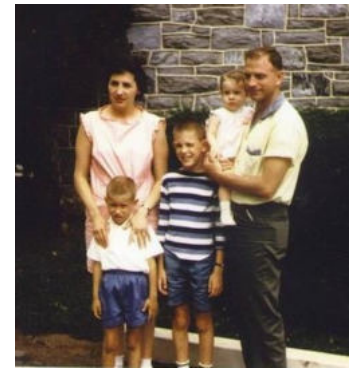
July 11th, and arriving in New York 6 days later. *“I will always remember that grand stairway with a plaque of the Queen Mary at the top in marble. We finally came down the gangplank and I was handed a pink of milk, the first I had in over three years. You can’t imagine how good it tasted. We as a group boarded a train for Sioux Falls, South Dakota and we received our thirty day leave before leaving for the Japanese theatre of operations.”*

“While I was on leave President Harry Truman after a firm warning to Japan that we had a new weapon that could cause massive destruction but it was disregarded so the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, that ended the war. I had to go to Clovis, New Mexico to put my time and was finally discharged in December 1945.”



In 1950 Carl was living with his sister Mabel and her family as well as his sister Irene, who had separated from Richard, and her son Rodney. Carl was working as a grocery clerk.

On May 24th, 1952, Carl married Marie Remesnik (b.1929) in Sacred Heart Church, Cornwall and had two sons, Carl M (b.1953), Stephen John (b.1957), and a daughter, Lynne.



Carl and his family moved to Chambersburg in 1957. Carl worked for Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company as a meat manager. He was then employed part-time by McKenzie Oil and retired from Kmart at the age of 80.

Sadly, Carl’s son Stephen passed away on March 21st, 2015 and a few short months later on July 1st, 2015 Carl passed away at Chambersburg Hospital. Marie joined Carl on March 7th, 2019. They are buried at Holy Savior Cemetery, Cornwall, Lebanon, Pennsylvania.

