

National Service for Maurice Carter of Wickhamford

Post-War National Service was based on the National Service Act of 1948. Healthy males aged 17 to 21 were called up for eighteen months into the Armed Services. In October 1950, due to the Korean War, this was extended to 2 years. Conscription was phased out from 1957 onwards, with the last men called up in November 1960 and the last men serving under the scheme leaving in May 1963.

Maurice L. Carter was the son of Arthur and Violet Phyllis Carter (*nee* Halford). He and his younger sister, Brenda, lived with their family at 71 Pitchers Hill, Wickhamford, when Maurice was called up for National Service in September 1957, aged 21. Maurice had served an apprenticeship at Heenan and Froud, an engineering firm in Worcester, prior to his call up. He was sent to the Gloucestershire Regiment and began his basic training at the Regimental Depot, Robinswood Barracks, Gloucester.

During his time in the Army he wrote home to his parents and had a number of photographs taken. After his sister's death, in 2014, some of these were found amongst her possessions and they form the basis for this article.

In his first letter home, dated 13th September 1957, Maurice gives his rank as 'Private' and service number as 23420426. He says that the barracks are half-way up a massive hill and that he is due to start his basic training the following Monday. He had just been given four inoculations, which made his arm ache terribly, and they had been given an easy weekend. Some men had 'gone out like a light' for a few minutes following the jabs. He said that the food was decent – 'better than at work' – and that 56 men had been drafted that weekend. The 'Glosters' were due to arrive home from Cyprus soon and he thought that it was possible that he would be going to Germany at some point.



Maurice Carter in his barrack room - undated

On 20th September, Maurice wrote home to say that training was very hard and that he had sprained an ankle in the gymnasium. He was now having to wear pumps and could not do drill or marching. He had to clean the barrack room most nights, ready for the morning inspection – ‘beds must be made hospital fashion’. He asked his mother to send him a ‘harmonica “C” and a face flannel’.

A month later, on 17th October, he wrote again to tell of his time on the firing range, when it had been raining all day. Maurice had fired a Bren light machine gun for the first time and had scored 75/100 points on the range. He had returned to barracks to do some ‘spud bashing’ and was now going to the NAAFI.



Maurice Carter on the firing range

His next letter to survive is dated 19th February 1958, and came from Keightley Barracks, Wuppertal, Germany, BFPO 44. This was a few miles east of Dusseldorf. He was then in the 1st Battalion. Maurice thanked his mother for sending him a Christmas cake and said that he had just been sent to Wuppertal to clean up the barracks for their battalion. The place was in a filthy condition having been empty for some months. His room was warm but the NAAFI was poor, with only the bare necessities. He was only expecting to be there for 6 weeks before the whole battalion would move to ‘Osnabrook’.

A letter of 11th March gave no location for him, but he thanked his mother for a parcel – ‘nice chocs’ and ‘liquid blanco is the best’. His unit must have been on the move, as he said that they would be in ‘Osnabrook’, at Brigade H.Q., in a few days. The weather had been terrible, with snow all the time and his cold was still continuing – ‘extra hankies would be useful’. Maurice said that he was having a job managing on his money, but only had 18 months more time to serve. He could afford luxuries like chocolates *etc* and fags were cheap. Another 280 men had arrived back from leave in England, but he didn’t expect any leave until September. He added a P.S. – ‘Apples were bad again’.



Soldiers working in the snow

By the time of the next surviving letter, a year later, on 26th March 1959, Maurice had been promoted to Lance Corporal and was with H.Q. Company, 12th Infantry Brigade, BFPO 36, which was at Osnabruke. He reported that he had received the money his parents had sent and also a parcel that day - ‘Egg broken, but very nice’. His only other comments were that the weather was close and there had been a lot of rain lately. The lawns at the base had different coloured crocuses that looked lovely and he had a four-day pass for Easter.



Maurice Carter, now a lance corporal



L/Cpl Carter at H.Q. Osnabruke

Maurice Carter's period of National Service would have ended in September 1959 and one of his photographs shows that, by that time, he had been promoted again, to Corporal.



Maurice Carter promoted to corporal

Appendix



This postcard, in the collection, is of a transport ship that ran from Harwich to Hook-of-Holland and presumably Maurice was aboard at some time. The ship was built in 1943 as the 'Linz' and was a war prize.

Tom Locke and Val Harman – September 2014