

1LT Woodrow Wilson Lennon 1914 ~ 1994

Early Life

Woodrow Wilson Lennon was born October 28, 1914, in Freeman, Columbus County, North Carolina, to Ella Mae Grimsley Lennon and John Luther Lennon. He was the sixth child and third son of nine surviving children. His father was a farmer but also a chemist and a school teacher. Woodrow grew up on the family farm with brothers and sisters and cousins who lived on a nearby farm. He graduated from high school in 1933, as the Great Depression was becoming worse and worse. Jobs were scarce.

First Army Experience



PVT Woodrow Lennon

On August 19, 1933, Woodrow enlisted as a private in the United States Army. The army in 1933 was a small organization and did not accept large numbers of enlistees. Woodrow was fortunate to secure one of these scarce positions.

Basic training was most likely at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, then a small, artillery training post. PVT Lennon was assigned to the First Observation Battery at Fort Bragg. This was a test unit established in 1922 to test field artillery equipment, concepts, and organization for flash and sound ranging, the methods used to locate hostile artillery in combat. (*Nolde, p 70*) This job also required knowledge of topography and meteorology, because terrain and weather affect artillery performance. The meteorology would bear fruit for Woodrow in a few more years. He served in this assignment until November 25, 1935.

In the summer of 1934 he met Sally Elaine Mallard, of Pollocksville, Jones County, North Carolina, who would become his wife. Their son, Dennis Lennon, tells the story:

As a 19-year-old army private, he had taken leave and was visiting his married sister Eloise Mason in Wilmington, North Carolina, near Carolina Beach, where the annual Pirate Festival was held each summer. Across the street from Eloise lived the Russ family, who were distantly related to the Lennons but also

related to the Mallards. Sixteen-year-old Sally had come down to visit the Russ family with her older married sister, Iva Lee Parker, for a few days during the festival. Sally and Woodrow met for the first time at the Pirate Festival. Woodrow pursued her from the first time he laid eyes on her and told his father, before reporting back to Fort Bragg, that he had met the woman he was going to marry. Thus began a lively letter exchange between the two of them, especially when he volunteered for overseas service.

In November 1935 now Private First Class Lennon volunteered for a new assignment in the Philippines, which included a promotion to Corporal and a pay increase. The extra money was dedicated to help his sister, Johnnie Mae, pay for college. From November 25, 1935 to May 2, 1936, Woodrow was in-transit to Fort Mills, Corregidor, Philippines. At Corregidor he served in the Coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery until May 19, 1938, when he returned to New York City by ship and was honorably discharged on July 7, 1938, having served nearly five years. A likely condition of his discharge was a commitment to the United States Army Reserve for a certain number of years.

Back Home

Woodrow had corresponded with Sally Elaine Mallard since meeting her in 1934. He proposed marriage upon his return to the United States in 1938 but the actual ceremony was postponed until he could secure steady employment. He worked various temporary jobs until May 8, 1939, when he began work for the United States Weather Bureau office in Wilmington, North Carolina. He did not know then that this job would become a life-long career. At the time, it permitted Woodrow and Sally to marry on August 11, 1940, in Trenton, North Carolina.



Meanwhile, the war news from Europe was increasingly grim. In September 1940, National Guard troops were ordered to begin reporting for active duty. Reserve officers were also being recalled to active service. On February 6, 1941, Woodrow got his call. He was first assigned to the Military Police at Camp Davis, North Carolina.

World War 2 Experience



Camp Davis was an Anti-Aircraft Artillery Training Center. Woodrow's prior service had been in artillery plus he now had job experience as a civilian weatherman. By June 10, 1941, he secured a transfer to the Weather Department of the Barrage Balloon School at Camp Davis, where he was trained to be an enlisted weather forecaster. He remained first at Camp Davis as an instructor, then was transferred to Camp

Tyson, Tennessee, again as an instructor. Of course, in the midst of this training and instructing, Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii and the United States was now officially at war.



Camp Tyson Weather Station

CPL Lennon was promoted to Sergeant on July 1, 1941, and to Technical Sergeant on November 1, 1941. Woodrow's commanding officer at Camp Tyson recognized his leadership potential and pressured him to attend Officer Candidate School (OCS). As of April 1, 1942, he was back at Camp Davis and back in school. He completed OCS and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant on June 25, 1942. 2LT Lennon returned to Camp Tyson, which was the only barrage balloon training center in the United States.

There he completed the General Course for Barrage Balloon Officers on September 12, 1942 and then the Advanced Weather Officer's Course on December 5, 1942. Throughout 1943 he was an officer-instructor in the enlisted division of the weather department of the Barrage Balloon School, teaching the men who would launch and manage the balloons how to use all of the current weather forecasting tools available. On August 9, 1943, he and Sally welcomed their first child, daughter Glenda Elaine Lennon.

1944 began with a promotion to First Lieutenant and assignment as Commanding Officer, Battery A, 319th Barrage Balloon Battalion. The 319th Battalion was one of four barrage balloon battalions composed entirely of African American recruits. 1LT Lennon left this assignment on March 19, 1944, and transferred to Camp Forrest, Tennessee, where he commanded a platoon in the 49th Light Signal Construction Battalion.



Barrage Balloon School

Meanwhile, in Europe, the D-Day invasion was imminent and the infantry had great need for more junior officers. Lennon was reassigned to the infantry and on May 25, 1944, reported to Basic Infantry Officers Training at Fort Benning, Georgia. Upon completion of the course on July 25, 1944, he was assigned to the 87th Infantry Division, the Golden Acorn, which was training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. In his own words:



1LT Lennon

July 26, 1944 to December 18, 1944 – Infantry Company Executive Officer and Commander Company A, 347th Infantry, 87th Division at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and in the ETO (European Theater of Operations) as part of the US Third Army. Responsible for the administration, training and supply of an infantry rifle company, in training and combat.”
(D. Lennon, A Soldier’s Untold Story, p 2)

The 87th Division was shipped to Europe in the autumn of 1944, arriving in Glasgow, Scotland on October 22, 1944. The division trained in England until November 30 and was then shipped to France, arriving in waves between December 1 to 3. The division, now attached to the Third Army under General Patton, moved into the vicinity of Metz in northeastern France, where it participated in the action against Fort Driant.

The Third Army’s objective was, and had been for some months, to reach and cross the Siegfried Line into Germany. The Army’s specific target was the industrial Saar region and the Rhine River. On December 10 the 87th Division moved east, replacing the 26th Division on the line in the vicinity of Gros-Rederching. The towns of Rimling, Obergailbach, and Guiderkirch were captured and the 87th was moving into Germany on December 16 when the German Army launched its Ardennes offensive. This is the area and the time period when 1LT Lennon was captured, probably near the village of Gersheim. In an unpublished memoir of his father, Dennis Lennon explained:

It was probably in the early morning hours of December 17, 1944 that Companies B and C of the 347th had been counterattacked by a German patrol, which subsequently led to many deaths and a significant number of POWs. I remember very clearly asking my father once in the naiveté of my youth how he and his men could have let themselves be captured when they had weapons to defend themselves. He just looked at me and very calmly said, “son, there is not a lot you can do when you are looking down the barrel of a German Mauser and you are out of ammo.” He told me that his unit had actually taken some high ground overlooking a German village and dug in for the night, but had sent back urgently for resupply because in taking this hill, they had exhausted the ammunition that they started out with. It was before nightfall and

they could see German troops and vehicles clearly moving about the village before darkness set in. Unfortunately, the needed ammunition never came and the next evening he was in the same village as a Prisoner of War, sitting in the cellar of one of the houses as the American artillery shelled the town. (D. Lennon, POW Experiences)

Dennis Lennon states that:

In actuality, he was probably captured the night of December 16, 1944, as this was recorded in the Morning Report record of Company B, 347th Regiment on December 24, 1944. He (Woodrow Lennon) was listed as MIA (Missing in Action) in France since 16 December 1944 along with 7 enlisted MIAs. The reason this was reported by Company B and not Company A (Woodrow's original Company) is that on December 12 he and the Executive Officer of Company B had been swapped, right before the action on December 15 through 18 December.

Prisoner of War Experience

After capture, 1LT Lennon was quickly transported deeper into Germany, to Stalag XII A near Limburg. He was processed, interrogated, relieved of his personal valuables and issued a Prisoner of War (POW) tag and number. By this time, transport inside Germany was difficult and time consuming. His exact date of arrival at Oflag 64 is unknown but is estimated at on or around January 10, 1945. His name was never entered on the official Oflag 64 roster. Meltesen remarks:

In the last 100 POWs arrival group were four men with scarlet fever. The group was quarantined in a barracks displacing yesterday's arrival group who were now billeted in the barn. Our last large space. ...but all of the cases marched out of camp. (Meltesen, p 114)

Woodrow marched from Oflag 64, Szubin, Poland, to Parchim, Germany. He kept a diary of the experience, as did many of the Kriegies. He recorded place names, kilometers marched, and food provided each day. He calculated the distance as 353 miles. His feet were also damaged by frostbite, for which combat service-connected injury he eventually received the Purple Heart medal.

From Parchim Woodrow traveled by boxcar to Oflag XIII-B, Hammelburg, joining POWs from the Battle of the Bulge. He settled in on March 10, 1945, where "nothing eventful happened for about two weeks" according to his son Dennis. On March 27th the Kriegies were confined to barracks under march orders for 5:30 the following morning. (Meltesen, *Roads to Liberation*, p 243)

The Allies were too close and the Germans were evacuating their prisoners eastward again. But on that day, Task Force Baum, commanded by Captain Abraham Baum, arrived. This was an armored rescue mission arranged by General Patton to rescue Lieutenant Colonel John Waters, his son-in-law. Hammelburg was about forty kilometers behind the front lines at this time. Ironically, Waters had been seriously wounded earlier that day and was in the hospital at the time of the raid. The raid caused great confusion and some successful escapes, but most Kriegies wound up recaptured and back in camp within a few days. Meanwhile, on March 28th, the Germans began the evacuation to the east, as planned. (Ambrose, *Citizen Soldier*, p 45) 1LT Lennon rode in a boxcar to Stalag Luft III, outside Nurnberg, where he joined British and American Air Force prisoners.

On April 3 the Kriegies were presented with a choice: stay or climb back on a train for the final destination, Stalag VII-A, Moosburg. Woodrow chose “stay” which meant he marched away from Stalag Luft III the next day, April 4, 1945. Again, Dennis Lennon tells his father’s story:

Things were pretty confused and upset in Germany about this time and the prisoners were able to forage for themselves – catching chickens and rabbits and living off the “fat of the land”, such as it was. They came across some Red Cross trucks near Sevitz and got some more of the life-saving parcels.

On April 20th they arrived at Stalag VIIA in Moosburg after walking day and night in the rain, however once they had crossed the Danube they merely “fooled along”. After remaining in prison camp here for a week, finally on Sunday, April 29th, at 7:30 am the 14th Armored Division and the 99th Infantry attacked the town and by about 9 am the American flag was flying over the city and the prisoners were free at last. (D. Lennon, POW Experiences)

On May 9, 1945, 1LT Lennon was flown to Rheims, France, and then transported by train to Camp Lucky Strike outside Le Havre. A Liberty Ship took him to New York City, where he arrived on June 9. From New York City he probably traveled back to Wilmington, North Carolina, where Sally and Glenda were living, for the usual 30 to 60 days of leave granted to liberated POWs. Dennis Lennon remembered his mother’s story:

I remember that my mom told me that she and Glenda were sitting on the front steps of their apartment when dad just came strolling up in his uniform. She had no idea that he was back in the states and it was a complete, but very happy shock for her. Glenda was not quite 2 years old and only remembered her dad from photos so she was very shy at first and not quite sure what to do. Finally, after a short while that mom and dad had been sitting side by side talking, Glenda came up behind dad and put her arms around his neck and said, “my daddy”!

On August 8, 1945 1LT Lennon reported to Camp Blanding Army Base in Starke, Florida, where he was assigned as Commanding Officer Company A, 222 Battalion, 78th Infantry Training Regiment. Meanwhile, the atom bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, on August 6, 1945, followed by the bombing of Nagasaki on August 9. On August 15, Japan surrendered, and the United States Army began to reduce its forces.

On September 22, 1945, Lennon was detached from his unit. From September 23 until October 31, 1945, he was on terminal leave. He was separated from active service on November 1, 1945 and transferred to the United States Army Reserve.

Postwar Life

Woodrow W. Lennon returned to civilian life. On November 1, 1945 he was reinstated as a Weather Observer with the United States Department of Commerce Weather Bureau, assigned to Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He also received a promotion with the grand annual salary of \$2,100. He and Sally, his now pregnant wife, and his daughter Glenda moved to Winston-Salem where they lived on Franklin Street while he worked at the local weather station at Smith Reynolds Airport. Sometime during that first year he received a second promotion and then accepted a position at the Weather Bureau in Savannah, Georgia.

On June 7, 1946, Sally and Woodrow welcomed a son, Robert Dennis Lennon, to their family. By March of 1947 they had moved to Savannah, Georgia, where Woodrow commuted about ten miles each day to the Weather Bureau, located at the Army Air Corps Airfield outside of town. In Savannah they lived in a small two story, two-bedroom apartment in a large complex where many other young families returning from the war had settled.



At the same time, Woodrow was pursuing a parallel career in the United States Army Reserve Corps. On September 18, 1947, the Army Air Corps became a separate military service, the United States Air Force and he became an officer in the Air Force Reserve. By that time, Woodrow had been promoted to Captain.

On May 6, 1948, Woodrow's father died unexpectedly at the family farm in Freeman, North Carolina. The family traveled to Freeman to attend the funeral and to check on his mom. Because of the death of his father, Woodrow began to look for opportunities to move closer to his mom and other relatives in eastern North Carolina. In Georgia, by October of 1951, the young family had

relocated to a small brick single family house in the town of Bloomingdale, which was closer to the airfield and more convenient for the family.

After their third child, Sally Carol Lennon, was born on March 16, 1952, Woodrow transferred to the Weather Bureau in Wilmington, North Carolina, where he became assistant to the station's chief meteorologist. The family moved to Wilmington in August of 1953. Woodrow spent the rest of his career in Wilmington, until his retirement on January 10, 1970.

Although he never completed a college degree, Woodrow attended several colleges as well as military technical schools to upgrade his meteorological knowledge and skills. He was certified to conduct pilot briefings, operate radiological instruments, and in 1963 passed a Private Pilots Ground School Course that included six separate subject examinations plus a final examination. He was an Aviation Weather Service specialist. During his career, the Weather Bureau began using planes, radar, doppler radar, computers and satellites to improve their forecasts. It was an exciting time to be a weatherman.

As an Air Force officer, Woodrow was also a weatherman. An example of his military meteorology training is the following, provided by Dennis Lennon:

Feb. 10, 1949 to March 25, 1949: On annual and Military Leave from U S Weather Bureau, Savannah, Georgia, to attend the Specialized High Altitude Forecasting Course, Weather Department, Air Force Technical School, Chanute Field, Illinois. This Course ends on May 10, 1949 Revert to Inactive Status on May 14, 1949. Return to Weather Bureau on May 16, 1949.*

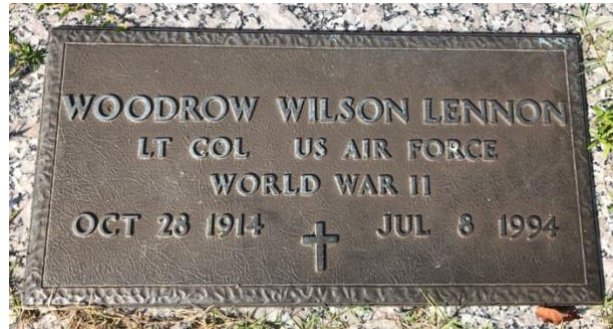


On June 26, 1957, CAPT Lennon was promoted to the rank of Major and on June 30, 1961, to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. He was transferred to the Air Force Retired Reserve on September 1, 1966, and retired completely from the Air Force in 1974.

In retirement, Woodrow devoted more time to his church, which had been an important part of his life since 1925. He was elected a Deacon in 1951 and served in that position in four different Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) churches. He and Sally remained in Wilmington, North Carolina, where he was an active member of Winter Park Baptist Church. He was a Deacon, taught Sunday School and served on numerous church committees, often as the chairman.

In 1970 he enrolled in the Volunteer in Missions Program, Foreign Missions Board, of the SBC. Beginning in 1975 Woodrow participated in eleven overseas missions, some lasting as long as six weeks, and five United States missions that all involved construction help.

In his final years, Woodrow suffered from cardiac and circulatory problems, the latter probably exacerbated by the frozen feet he had suffered on the Long March from Oflag 64. Woodrow Wilson Lennon died from a heart attack on July 8, 1994, in Wilmington, North Carolina



Military Awards

Purple Heart

Army Good Conduct

American Defense Medal

EAME (Europe, Africa, Middle East) Campaign Medal

World War II Victory Medal

Air Force Longevity Service Award (Ribbon) Awarded April 19, 1956

Armed Forces Reserve Medal

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Photos from Lennon family files and Find-A-Grave