

About PFC Louis Christian Schwender

“Smoky”

by Clifford L. Wolf



Louis C. Schwender
Smokey

Not a lot is known about the early life of Louis Christian Schwender who was known to his family and friends as Smoky. He was born in Cincinnati, Ohio on Dec 22, 1906 to George Schwender and Clara Radloft Schwender. His father was a machinist and his mother, like most of that day stayed at home with the children. He was the 4th child of 5. His siblings were George L. Schwender, Elizabeth Schwender, Luella Schwender and Carl Schwender.

What we do know of Louis Schwender's life is taken from the memoirs of John Edward Wilp who put them into a book about his mother, Loretta Magdaline Bronner Wilp, which he titled *Loretta*.

Loretta was born on June 20, 1900 and married John Henry Wilp on June 15, 1920.



John Wilp, Loretta Bronner Wilp, Sally Reisenberg (flower girl) Margaret Bronner & Edward Wilp

Loretta and John had seven children before the start of the war. The children are:

Marie Margaret Wilp (1921-2012)
Phyllis Rose Wilp (1922-2002)
John Edward Wilp (1923-2015)
Doris May Wilp (1925-)
Roberta A Wilp (1926-2007)
Ralph Francis Wilp (1928-2008)
George Henry Wilp (1930-)

John Wilp was a plumber by trade. During the depression, like millions of other people, John was laid off by Eulein Plumbing, so he struck out on his own. He bought an old panel truck and went into the plumbing business for himself. He was able to line up some jobs and did the work but he didn't always get paid. Other people were also having a hard time.

John Wilp died very young. His son John Edward Wilp describes what family members recalled concerning his death.

In January, 1933, on a Friday night Dad woke up feeling a little cold, got out of bed intending to go down into the cellar and put some more coal in the furnace. We had the coal-burning furnace which generated steam heat. The steam was piped to iron radiators which heated the rooms.

We had a different dog, a big Collie, named Prince. Spotty had died about a year before. Dad had really been attached to that little dog. When she died it was the second time that Marie saw Dad cry. Prince liked to sleep at the foot of the stairs in front of the radiator in the dining room. Dad came down the stairs in the dark and at the bottom stepped on the dog. Prince reared up and threw Dad

against the radiator. He turned on the dining room light, aimed a kick at the dog, who quickly got out of the way, muttered a few choice words and went on down into the cellar and put some coal on the fire. Then he went on back up the stairs and got back into bed his side aching very badly.

George, age two, was sleeping with Mom and Dad on this particular night. After Dad got back into bed George rolled against him in his sleep and accidentally kicked Dad in the side. Dad groaned, woke Mom up and asked her to keep George on her other side or put him back into his own bed. The next day Dad did not get out of bed because his side hurt so much and he was feeling lousy. He stayed in bed the rest of the day which was unheard of for him who was never sick.

Early in the evening Phyl who was now ten years old got George ready for bed and took him in to say good-night to Dad. Uncle Roder and some other people were in his room visiting. Phyl said to George, "Say good-night to Daddy" and she kind of held him away from Dad so he wouldn't bump his sore side. Dad said, "How's my little yellow canary?" as he called him sometimes. As she left, Phyl heard him say to his friends, "That's my Jim." Dad and Phyl were still the best of buddies.

Later that evening Dad was in such pain that Mom called Doctor Cavanaugh. He came to the house and examined Dad and found that he had some broken ribs and he was afraid that a rib punctured one lung. The doctor stayed with him but there was nothing he could really do. Dad asked for a cigarette but Mom said, "Don't be silly, John, in your condition." Doctor Cavanaugh said, "Go ahead. Let him have one. It won't make any difference now."

Bert was only six years old but she knew something bad was happening in the bedroom and she was afraid. When she had to go to the bathroom to get ready for bed she wouldn't walk past the bedroom. Uncle Roder was still there and he took her past. Later, as Marie remembers, she heard Dad moaning and tossing about in bed. He became more and more disoriented and more incoherent and finally delirious, Mom and the doctor trying to comfort him. This was Saturday night. On Sunday he died in his bed, death caused by pneumonia. It left Mother in shock.

Doris remembers being in the dining room when they carried him down the stairs in a wooden box, but we didn't have a full realization of what was happening at the time. We didn't know why he was in the box. We didn't know what death was.

Loretta was now a widow at age 33. For almost 5 years she went at it alone, raising 7 children through the depression and prohibition. Around 1937 Louis "Smoky" Schwender entered Loretta's life. He was an overseer for the Cincinnati dump at the end of Evans Street. Smoky was first married to Nancy Schwender but later divorced her.

Some time in 1937 he was told by a friend about a cute waitress working the Heigh-Ho Restaurant in the West end of Cincinnati at the corner of Gest and Evans Streets. The waitress was Marie Wilp, but Louis took immediate interest in Loretta, Marie's mother. They hit it off well and would go out for drinks, but because she strictly observed her Catholic faith, she could not marry a divorced man. John Edward Wilp explains what life was like during this period of the depression:

After the Dutch Mill Mom got a job as cook up in Price Hill called the French Villa. As usual, Marie, now eighteen and out of school, was soon with her working as a waitress. Mom was still a young woman at age thirty-eight which enabled her to keep going. It took them more than an hour to get to work. They walked to Sherman Avenue, caught a Vine & Norwood street car to McMillan Street to catch a Crosstown car to West 8th Street and then on a Glenway car to the restaurant. They started to work at six o'clock in the evening. After work they would catch the "Nite Owls". Russ French, the owner, would let them off fifteen minutes early during the week so they could catch the last car into town. They had to go all the way into town.

In town they had to wait half an hour or so for the last street car to Sherman Avenue in Norwood, and then walk home, after working all evening. They seldom saw the daylight, only when they were on the way to work. On weekends they would get a ride home. Smoky came up and helped in the kitchen with the dirty dishes, pots and pans. They all had to be done by hand, no dish washers in those days. Mom and Smoky would have their drinks and joked and kidded around as they worked. He was always so cheerful and a great boost for her morale and helped her get through some rough times. Phyl at age seventeen started to come along and help. As far as anybody else knew they were twenty-one and twenty two and they stayed at these ages for a number of years.

The war was on. In 1942 women were working in defense plants all over the country. Mom got a job at Wright's in the foundry. That was hard, hot work for a man much less a woman. She worked there until an accident caused her to hurt her leg. Wright's was what is now the General Electric Plant in Evendale.

In the meantime Smoky was drafted. He was in his middle thirties and had no dependents, the type of man that went first in the draft. If he and Mom had been married he probably would not have had to go and would have lived a lot longer. Although they went together six or seven years Mom was reluctant to get married because Smoky was divorced and Mom lived up to her religion and she would have to give up a lot. The second reason was us. She felt that if any of us could not get along with him it would be a tragedy after all the years of keeping us together. Actually we all really liked Smoky and he was very good to us. Sometimes, for example, he would come all the way from Northside early on a Sunday morning and would have a delicious meal ready for us when we came home from Church. He was a very humble man and thought he was not good enough to be a father to us. It's too bad we never got the chance to find out but we think he would have been great.

In 1942 Smoky was drafted into the Army and after basic training at Camp Atterbury, Indiana, he was transferred to a base in the California desert.

Loretta visiting Smokey
Indio, CA



PFC Louis C. Schwender

Loretta went out to visit him. John Edward Wilp explains:

After basic training at Camp Atterbury in Indiana, Smoky was transferred out to a base in California out in the desert. Mom went out to visit him and finally gave in and they were married while she was out there. Mom did not have that in mind when she left but they loved each other and the war was on and everything was so uncertain. Would they ever see each other again? Then people did things because there might not be a tomorrow for them.



Smoky's Wedding Ring

The next time we saw Smoky was two weeks before he was ready to leave for overseas. It was in April, 1943. He had been assigned to an Army Tank and Tank Destroyer Unit which later served under General Patton in Europe.

Mom and Smoky were out visiting some of their old haunts and some of their old friends and then came home, Smoky looking very happy and started to cook supper. Mom was watching Marie who was in her ninth month and suddenly said, "I think you better get to the hospital, Marie." So she and Smoky took Marie to the hospital in a cab and stayed there until Cindy was born. Because he was in uniform some people thought he was the father. He had a nice young smile. He and Mom were the only ones allowed to visit Marie and they did every night. That was the last time we saw him alive. He left after his two-week leave. We were glad he came into our lives, we were especially glad for Mom. During the next years it was work, rationing, and out with some women friends for Mom. She did get out once in a while with her many friends.



In April 1943, PFC Louis Schwender was assigned to Company A of the 773rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, which was part of General Patton's 3rd Army in Europe. He was wounded on 17 Aug 1944 and received a Purple Heart.

On 29 November, Bn. Hq (Fwd CP) moved from OBERESCH to BIRINGEN at 1130. Distance travelled two miles. The CP vicinity received quite a bit of enemy mortar and 7.5cm fire during day and night. Ren Co. - At 0600 hrs, the Pioneer pltn left COLLEN (atchd to 3rd pltn A Co.) with primary mission to sweep roads of mines from FURWEILER (174869) to 188869 to 188854. No mines encountered on road but pltn was under heavy artillery fire. There were no casualties but vehicle of 2nd Pioneer section damaged by artillery fire and steel fragments of roadblocks. 2nd section returned to COLLEN at 1300 with 1st section still attached to A Co. 1st, 2nd and 3rd pltns alerted but remained in bivouac. A Co. - At 0700, the 3rd pltn was moving into FURWEILER when a concentration of enemy artillery fell in the vicinity of the pltn causing them to seek shelter close to the building. The third TD in maneuvering for a position ran over some enemy mines destroying the M10 completely, killing 4 men and injuring 8 others. 1 man missing. At 0800, the 2nd pltn moved to position at 18608790. At 0900 the 1st pltn moved into position at 16908385. All pltns were under heavy enemy artillery and mortar fire. B Co. - No operations during the day. C Co. - At approximately 1130 the Co. CP was forced to move on order of the Regt'l Comdr to west end of OBERESCH. The 1st pltn assembled at Co. CP as reserve. At 0600 hours, the 2nd and 3rd pltns in support of the 1st and 3rd Battalions, 359th Infantry, respectively, started to advance E to objective but were forced to hold at enemy AT ditch E of OBERESCH until 1130 hours. At that time advance continued with light opposition. At 1500 hours pltns occupied the following positions: CP and 1st pltn 15108948, 2nd pltn 19258930, 3rd pltn 18208975. Artillery fire from enemy was heavy in OBERESCH. Weather, cloudy.

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773 TDB Commander Notes for 29 Nov 1944

He was killed in action on 29 Nov 1944 near Metz along the French – German border. It was Marie and Phyllis who broke the news to Loretta while she was in the hospital recovering from an operation. She was a tough woman.

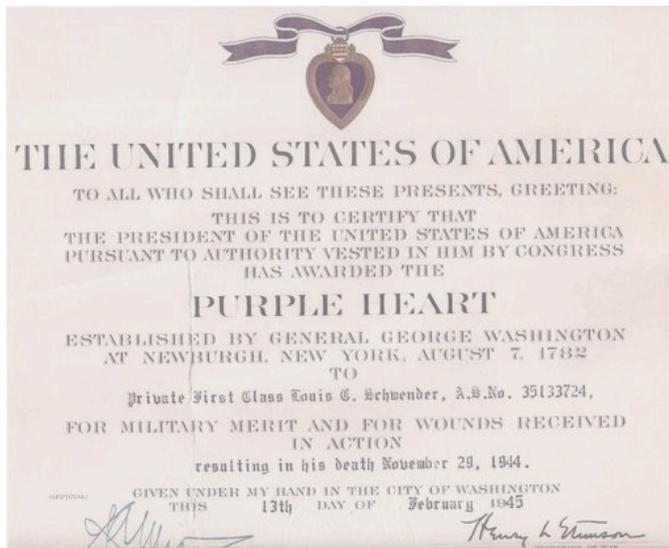
**SCHWENDER'S
WAR FATALITY
IS CONFIRMED**

Confirmation of a war department telegram reporting the death of Pfc Louis C. Schwender while fighting in Germany Nov. 29, was received by his widow, Mrs. Loretta Wilp Schwender, 1911 Elm, Friday.

At the time of his death, Schwender was 37 years of age. Entering the service in March, 1942, he went overseas a year ago. He was wounded in France Aug. 17, but later rejoined his outfit.

Schwender had seven stepchildren. He also leaves two brothers and a sister, Pfc Carl Schwender, a veteran of two years' service in the South Pacific, who is now recovering from malaria in a Massachusetts hospital; George Schwender, with the state guard; and Mrs. Elizabeth Goch.





According to John Wilp, one of Smokey's buddies wrote this letter:

My Dear Loretta,

I do hope that this letter does not sadden you more. I, and all the officers and men, wish you to know that our thoughts have been with you in your sorrow, and that we do share your loss very deeply with you.

This may seem to you a very late date for such a letter but censorship did not allow my writing before this. The Army is very strict about that, so please don't think that I left Lou down or in any way forgot your suffering.

I know there is nothing that I can say that will soften your heartache, but I, and all of us, want you to know that we shall always remember Lou as the friendliest, most generous, and most thoughtful friend that a man ever had. You know yourself, Loretta, that he was known and loved by everyone in the 773rd. That he picked me as his best friend was, and always will be, an honor to me! We were as close, I believe, as any two men ever were and I assure you that your great loss was also mine.

The only hollow note of consolation that I can give you is that he went to God suddenly and without suffering. That is what he hoped for in case he had to go. I pray that God may ease your burden and that you may find comfort and pride in your memories of him. I know, my dear, that is a big order, but if you can bring yourself to remembering his accomplishments as a soldier you can well be proud. He was every inch a good soldier, and never once did he shirk any duty no matter how unpleasant or dangerous it was. Lou had a lot to live for and to fight for, and he certainly proved his metal in so doing.

And to all of you famous "kids" of Lou's, I also share your loss and sorrow. "Famous" -- you all are known in every country, state, and town that we ever stopped in. Any place "Pop" would find a new friend, he wasn't long in showing your pictures and bragging about each and every one of you.

If I should seem to be abrupt, I wish you would forgive me, this is somehow very hard for me. If you wish to ask me anything else or in any way I can do anything in the world for you please write to me.

May God bless you and comfort you,

Very sincerely,

Ken

Feb 12, 1945
Germany

My Dear Loreta

I do hope that this letter does not sadden you more, and all the Officers and men, wish you to know that our thoughts have been with you in your sorrow, and that we do share your loss very deeply with you.

This may seem to you a very late date for such a letter but censorship did not allow my writing before this. The Army is very strict about that, so please don't think that I left Lon down or in any way forgot your suffering.

I know there is nothing that I can say that will soften your heartache, but I and all here want you to know that we shall always remember Lon as the friendliest, most generous, and most thoughtful friend that we ever had. You know yourself Loreta, that he was known and loved by everyone in the 773rd. That he picked me as his best friend was,

and always will be, an honor to me!
It was as close, I believe, as any two
men ever were and I assure you that
your great loss was also mine.

The only hollow note of consolation
that I can give you is that he went
to God suddenly and without suffering.
That is what he hoped for in case he
had to go.

I pray that God may ease your burden
and that you may find comfort
and pride in your memories of him.
I know, Myrtles, that is a big
order, but if you can bring your-
self to remembering his accomplishments
as a soldier you can well be proud.

He was every inch a good soldier,
and never once did he shirk any duty
no matter how unpleasant or
dangerous it was. You had a lot
to live for and to fight for, and he
certainly proved his metal in so doing.
And to all of you famous "kids" of Lou's,

I also share your love and sorrow.
"Famous" - you get as known in
every country, state and town that
we ever stopped in. Any place I go
could find a new friend, he would
love to show me your pictures and
talk about you. I told every one
of you.

If I should seem to be abrupt I
wish you would forgive me, this is
somehow very hard for me. If you
wish to ask me anything else or in
any way I can do anything in the
world for you please write to me.
May God bless you and
comfort you.

Very sincerely
Ken

P.S. I will send you some more pictures
of you that I have as soon as I get
them processed.

Included with this letter were some pictures from Germany. Some of the pictures were sent back from Germany.



Here is a picture of my buddies front of a weapons carrier. See how the windshields are painted and that is what we look through when we are driving"



*"Here are the three of us ----on the ocean-----
Paul ----myself, not----. (parts missing)*



"This is our top sargent with the company banner. His name is Gordan." Not sure of the name. It's hard to read.

Smoky had left her rather independent financially with the widow's pension and the additional insurance he took out. He took as much as he could because, as he had said, he didn't need any extra money because he wouldn't be going out and spending any. But, she continued to work until she tripped at work and hurt her knee, which required an operation.

Louis Schwender is buried at Sts Peter & Paul Cemetery, Reading, OH next to Loretta.





IN GRATEFUL MEMORY OF

Private First Class Louis C. Schwender, A.S.No. 35133724,

WHO DIED IN THE SERVICE OF HIS COUNTRY ~~AT~~

in the European Area, November 29, 1944.

HE STANDS IN THE UNBROKEN LINE OF PATRIOTS WHO HAVE DARED TO DIE

THAT FREEDOM MIGHT LIVE AND GROW AND INCREASE ITS BLESSINGS.

FREEDOM LIVES, AND THROUGH IT, HE LIVES—

IN A WAY THAT HUMBLER THE UNDERTAKINGS OF MOST MEN

Franklin D. Roosevelt

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Letter in Memory of Louis C Schwender



*The United States of America
honors the memory of*

LOUIS C. SCHWENDER

*This certificate is awarded by a grateful
nation in recognition of devoted and
selfless consecration to the service
of our country in the Armed Forces
of the United States.*

John F. Kennedy
President of the United States

The Country Honors the Memory... Signed by John F Kennedy



The 48 Star Flag that Draped PFC Schwender's Casket



Back: John Edward Wilp, Roberta A. Wilp, Wilp, Doris May Wilp, Marie Margaret Wilp.

Center: Loretta Bronner Wilp Schwender

Front: Phyllis Rose Wilp, Ralph Francis Wilp, George Henry Wilp

Fellow on the end with the handkerchief is a friend