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Carl S. Auerbach

World War II-era Naval Letters

New York, New Jersey, Florida, California, Pacific: 1936-1945

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A collection of 550 World War II era letters and postcards from author, illustrator, and businessman, Carl S. Auerbach to his wife Ruth from 1936 to 1945, most of which were sent during his tour of duty with the Navy. All items are very good or better with slight curling and tears from opening. Thousands of pages of content including his thoughts on Roosevelt's death. An extensive compilation of the daily life of a sailor.



In 1936 Carl S. Auerbach decided to leave the life of wealth he was born into and pursue his artistic endeavors, namely writing a novel. During this time he wrote to the longtime focus of his affection, Ruth Shedlong, whose photo is included. His letters are full of well intentioned advice and theories on life; “remember we’ve got our dream caps on... what I’m trying to say – all I’m trying to say – is that what you need is some definite philosophy of life.” He goes on to say, “but there’s a bridge to cross first (and here I grow vulgar, or stupid, or both – but I mean it.). How about SEX! I’m not Freudian, Ruth. I’m not over-sexed, or over-sex-conscious, or abnormal in any way. Yet I’ve a quarrel with our society of today that chomps the bit so tightly on so important a question.”

His method of courtship worked and in 1940, shortly before shipping off with the U.S. navy, the two of them were married. He spent the next two years bouncing between bases from Rochester, New York, to Plainfield, New Jersey and was eventually sent to Sampson Naval training base at Lake Seneca, New York. “Arrived OK too – except that the handle of my suitcase broke as I got off the train, so I had to tuck the case under my arm and stroll through the slush like Ben Franklin arriving in Philadelphia.”

During his time at Sampson he was taught the essentials of war such as hand to hand combat, how to survive a gas attack, and how to work with little or no sleep. Auerbach was determined to be top of his group and was eager to attend radio school, his goal being an eventual Quartermaster position. In a postcard dated, June 26th 1943 he writes Ruth, “Just learned that I passed the first part of the radio entrance exam...the second part is to be given Monday AM, here’s hoping.” By 1944 he was attending classes in Rhode Island; “this is like book camp only worse. Dozens of little nuisance rules and regulations to learn – all different from those I’ve already learned...I’m scheduled to go to Quartermaster’s School – here or elsewhere...the course takes 16 weeks.”

Successfully obtaining the title of Quartermaster led to duties in Florida with the U.S. Wildcat, a Stag-class tanker. “All day yesterday we rode through the swamps of Florida, arriving at Miami at 8 last night. Then we [boarded] some ancient buses for the five hour ride to Key West...This is a very nice base have all the facilities I could hope for.” Shortly after he writes of an experience during an oncoming hurricane; “We have been anchored and in Key West harbor since Tuesday afternoon...over the radio loud speaker we could hear drama after drama. Ships asking for navigational aids, shove stations pleading for certain ships to anchor them, lightships being abandoned, and ships standing by to pick up survivors, -all you’ve ever read of sea adventure going on around us.”

He stayed with this ship until the end of the war accompanying it on convoys to the Philippines, Panama, and to California. “I can now go back and tell you that I was in Panama...the Panama Canal was, literally and figuratively, the high spot of my travels so far. It is listed among the wonders of the world, I think, and surely belongs there. Our ship took a day to pass through it, from one ocean to another...if man ever did anything to boast about, the canal is it.” In February of 1945 he writes, “Completed another leg of my journey...It’s good to see land again, even if it’s far from home....The war news is surely encouraging these days. Let’s hope it means an increasing speed from now on to the end.”

In April of 1945 he was continuing his service when the President passed away saying, “Roosevelt’s death was a great surprise here as elsewhere. I am glad that it is Truman who now takes over, rather than Wallace. And I feel that the war will surely not be lengthened by this sudden change.” A month later he found himself proven right, “By the way, now that Germany is out, and Japan is a question of time, there will be more and more information about the release of service men.” Auerbach would return home in November of 1945.

Also included are poems by Auerbach written at sea under the pseudonym of Hiawatha Ginaburg. “Bloomers wears this mighty sailor, And his boots are made of Khaki, With a white cap as his headdress, Might sailor – he look wacky.” After the war Carl and Ruth moved to Syosset, Nassau County, Long Island, New York where he continued writing, publishing some minor work.

A vast accumulation of a sailor’s tour of duty with an intimate look at his day to day activities as told to his wife back home. [BTC#386351]