



## **William E. Christensen**

United States Army

Staff Sergeant

European Theater

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Rick Randle

**THIS INTERVIEW IS NOT EDITED FOR CONTENT, LANGUAGE OR HISTORICAL ACCURACY**

**Rick:** [Bill Christensen was a staff sergeant with the Tenth Mountain Division, a special infantry group trained in skiing and mountaineering.]

Bill, can you tell us about your early life up until the time you joined the service?

**Bill:** Well my parents lived on 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue and “C” Street right between “B” and “C” when I was younger, which was just above the LDS Hospital. So as a youth I used to go up on the slopes there just above the Veteran’s hospital and ski down on little short boards, I was probably 6 or 7 years old. The skis were short enough and you just kept them on with a rubber band, a big thick one, and all you could do was come straight down the hill, but that was my 1<sup>st</sup> experience skiing so I’ve been skiing a long time. We used to go down the streets also on sleighs up in the avenues and very little traffic in those days so we’d get on 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue and go all the way down to 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue on a sleigh just zipping down the street.

**Rick:** They used to block off some of those streets, didn’t they? I remember 7<sup>th</sup> South used to be a designated sleigh-riding hill when I was young.

**Bill:** So that was fun as a youth to do some of those things.

**Rick:** Then you graduated from East High?

**Bill:** No I went to South High. And I graduated in 1944 on a Friday night and had a call from the US Army Uncle Sam for Saturday morning, so I went in the service.

**Rick:** One day after you graduated from high school.

**Bill:** The next morning. So I was just barely turning 19 at the time.

**Rick:** Were most kids anxious to go in? Of course, you knew there was a big war on. What were your thoughts?

**Bill:** Well I knew that I would be in the service sometime and I got that call actually several months before I even graduated, so they let me graduate from high school and then go in the service there. So we went into Fort Douglas and I was probably one of the younger because at that time they were drafting people in their 30's, late 30's. So when we went to boot camp a lot of those were physically out of condition and they had a hard time doing some of the jumping.

**Rick:** Where did you go?

**Bill:** I was at Camp Walders, Texas, and that was 15-week training. And at that time just before we was completing that, why I saw a bulletin on the board which said, "*We're looking for volunteers that have had any mountain experience or skiing experience to join this 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division.*" So I wrote a letter to the address and a few days later a reply come back well, "*we're going to accept you.*" And at the time I was on furlough right after that. So after that furlough then I joined the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division rather than being assigned someplace else, probably the Pacific so I was pleased with that. At that time, the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain had trained at Camp Hale Colorado during the winter months and I joined them about September of '44. And at that time they were training with mules in Texas, just out of Camp Swift Texas and so we went out and trained with mules and the other type.

**Rick:** Just pack animals?

**Bill:** Just pack animals.

**Rick:** For mountain trail duty?

**Bill:** Yes.

**Rick:** How long were you at Camp Hale?

**Bill:** They were at Camp Hale about 2 years and it was unique because the army had never done

anything with mountain warfare before and so a lot of those troops had never been on skis before, I mean you ask how many were experienced skiers, a lot of them had never been on a pair of skis.

**Rick:** So they needed to learn the basics?

**Bill:** They did, and of course in those days they just had rope tows no fancy lifts like they have today. But it was again, learning to live in the cold and snow; they had bivouac where they would just go out and spend several days in little white pup tents and just cook their meals and everything right there. So it was a good experience for a lot of them.

**Rick:** How long were you in Texas working in the training center with mules?

**Bill:** We were there until December of '44 and then we received orders to go to Virginia and from there to Italy.

**Rick:** So you went over directly from [Bill: Camp Swift] to Italy.

**Bill:** To Italy. And we went on the USS America which was their finest cruiser at the time. But they had stripped all of the fancy things out of it and put bunks 6 or 8 high and so there was about 5,000 of us on that ship.

**Rick:** No hammocks, just bunks?

**Bill:** Just bunks.

**Rick:** Which was the best position, the top or the bottom?

**Bill:** I preferred the bottom. With that many men on board why they had chow lines that were a couple of blocks long, just wind around the decks until they got to the kitchen. But I've never been sea sick and some of them were although it was a fairly quiet cruise, it wasn't rough at all.

But the ship did go all by itself whereas many during that time had escorts. But because of the speed of this particular ship, why they figured that they could make it on its own without any real problem. So we arrived at Naples, Italy. It was about a 6-7 day voyage.

**Rick:** Were all the men on that ship of the Tenth Mountain Division?

**Bill:** Yes.

**Rick:** So, that would be about half of the division?

**Bill:** That's right about half that division was on that one ship. From Naples we got into boxcars and traveled north and went through Rome and up through that part of Italy. It took us a couple of days I guess to do that.

**Rick:** How many men to a boxcar?

**Bill:** 25-30

**Rick:** So you could sit down.

**Bill:** Yes, but it was wintertime it was December so there was no heat or anything. But it wasn't too bad it; wasn't like some of the movies you see with the German's treating them. But we camped at Pisa where the leaning tower of Pisa is and they had a large area there which accommodated most of the division so it was just kind of a base camp. And from there we spent 10 days or 2 weeks something from there. And then from there we went right into the Apennines and bivouacked for sometime. And they were just getting the idea or getting information as to where the Germans were located and where they were heavily fortified and just making plans for the battle.

**Rick:** Did you have a base camp in the Apennines?

**Bill:** We had just a base camp. In order to keep busy we went out and had 5 mile marches everyday or so and we slept right in the snow in little pup tents. And differing from a lot of the mountain men, a lot of them had sleeping bags but I had 2 blankets and no sleeping bag, slept on the snow for probably 2 weeks.

**Rick:** Were you outfitted with winter clothing and boots and gloves?

**Bill:** That was the interesting thing about the army. We had the latest winter equipment when we were in Colorado and they took it all away from us and gave us just the regular brown khaki pants and an overcoat but no down jackets, no down sleeping bag, nothing like that. So that was the way we went in.

**Rick:** Well sleeping in the snow with 2 blankets [**Bill:** Pretty cruel] it had to be pretty cold at night?

**Bill:** Fortunately there were some farms nearby that had straw stacks, so we got straw and made it about a foot deep and was able to survive that way.

**Rick:** What happened next?

**Bill:** From there we got in trucks and were taken right into the front lines. By truck we went as near as we could to the positions and then I remember walking several miles over a snow packed road and we had packs on that weighed 50-60 pounds, and if you lost your balance just a little bit that pack would just flip you right over because you'd lose your footing.

**Rick:** Did you have skis with you?

**Bill:** No, we had no skis with us. Some of the equipment, you know on some of the trucks they had some. I was only on skis twice.

**Rick:** During your entire tour of duty? Well tell us about going into the front lines and some of your combat experiences.

**Bill:** The 1<sup>st</sup> part of the Apennines was rather interesting because when the war started, we fought against Italy. And as the war progressed, they joined us to fight the Germans and so being in this area (where there were some farms in the mountains) they had homes, which the people had left, and the homes were brick structures and the lower level was used for the animals and the second story was where the people lived. And a lot of those homes, why the Italian troops had occupied the second story and we got to sleep where the animals did.

**Rick:** So the Italian Army was an ally of the Germans, then the same soldiers fought along side the United States and Britain.

**Bill:** They didn't accomplish too much but they helped with the language problem and they did secure certain posts, you know where they had a certain area where they would cover and protect and so on.

**Rick:** And they were upstairs sleeping in the beds?

**Bill:** I don't know if they had beds or not but I was sleeping on straw down below. And we of course we cooked our own meals and at that time they had a ration called a 10 ration 10 in 1 ration and we had little mountain stoves, little gas stoves that we used to cook. They had powdered eggs and they had Canadian bacon and they had biscuits and different things that you could cook on the little stoves so we managed pretty good that way for several weeks. After that then they went into a major offensive taking in the high positions and one of those mountains was called Mt. Belvedere. And that was a stronghold of the German Army and the Germans thought that that mountain could never be taken from them because they had it heavily fortified; they had mine fields all around it, they had you know, artillery and being on top and anyone that wanted to attack it would have to come up the slope this way. So what happened in that case, why they planned a night attack and this is where the mountaineering came into play. Some of the specialized troops climbed up a formation that was almost perpendicular and when they got

to the top they didn't see any Germans at that time so they established lines, rope lines and so on where they could bring up other troops and equipment. And they had pack howitzers, which is a small 30mm cannon, and because once they got established on top and then when we opened up with artillery, which was back 5 miles from where we were, we just caught the Germans by surprise. They didn't think it would be possible for anyone to invade and coming at them on that position so that's where the mountaineering really played a big part and where it was most successful.

**Rick:** Did you have mules there?

**Bill:** Yeah, they had mules that brought up some of the supplies. Yes they did.

**Rick:** So it had helped getting training with the pack animals.

**Bill:** In fact I remember one occasion where we had our platoon sergeant who was a staff sergeant and then another brother who was a plain sergeant, the 2 brothers were together. And one day as these pack mules were moving around through the trees and up through the snow bringing supplies this younger brother was going around one of the pack mules and he had a grenade on his loop over his belt and hitting that mule pulled the pin on that grenade and just killed him instantly. And that same brother, some weeks later was shot through the head by a sniper so both of those brothers were killed within a couple of weeks.

**Rick:** So you defeated the Germans in the mountain top battle?

**Bill:** That's right. At the end, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of that battle I was in a squad and I was the scout, and 12 was in the squad and there was a scout and then there was another what we call a B.A.R. man that had an automatic rifle at the time, and then just your rifleman. Anyway, we were given the assignments to go and reconnoiter the position at night to see how many were left up on that hill. So we started out at about 9 or 10 o'clock at night and there was about 6 or 8 inches of snow on the ground and we proceeded along a small path where there was a creek and it was a moonlit night, you could see half as well as during the daytime. And we proceeded along this

area and then started up a hill to get to the top and I was the 1<sup>st</sup> scout and there was a 2<sup>nd</sup> scout...there was a pack for me and this fellow was born in Germany and came to the United States when he was about 10 years old and then joined the army, so he could speak perfect German. So as we went up the hill I came across a large tree and as I moved up into the tree was a rifle sticking out from the tree and I thought, "*Well that's crazy.*" So I smacked it with my rifle and it was a German on the other end of that rifle. And so I knocked the rifle out of his hand and this other fellow my 2<sup>nd</sup> scout who could speak German started asking questions. And they were talking back and forth and trying to find out how many soldiers were up on the hill and what kind of weapons they had and all about them; and so they must have talked for a couple of minutes. Then all of a sudden I could hear noise up above and one of the other soldiers up on the hill threw a grenade down and it lit close enough that it blew my helmet off.

**Rick:** One of the German soldiers?

**Bill:** Yeah, one of the German soldiers was up on top. Then they opened up with machine gun fire from the top of the ridge so that was our signal to get out of there. So we just turned and ran down the hill and those bullets were at our feet all the way down. But for some reason, luckily, none of our squad was injured we all got back to the base safely. But we had enough information that we could give to the officers to tell them how many men was up there and what kind of equipment and everything.

**Rick:** Were the Germans better equipped for winter than the US Soldiers?

**Bill:** At that point in the war they were lacking a lot of things, they were running low on ammunition, they didn't have enough gasoline to keep their trucks and tanks going, so I don't know if they were better prepared. At one time they probably were but at that point they were not.

**Rick:** That was near the end of the war.

**Bill:** Near the end of the war. In fact later on they used some of the farmer's horses to pull their guns and pull their big artillery pieces; they didn't have enough gas to run their cars.

**Rick:** That German soldier behind the tree, I guess if you'd have gone by he would have shot you -if you hadn't noticed.

**Bill:** Probably, I mean he was just absolutely flabbergasted that there was somebody coming up.

**Rick:** It surprised him.

**Bill:** We just surprised him enough that he didn't shoot.

**Rick:** So you took him prisoner I guess?

**Bill:** No, we didn't have time for that we just ran back down the hill as fast as we could. But we did, again, in that 2-minute period or however long it was, why we got a lot of information because of this other soldier knowing German.

**Rick:** And he was willing to talk, the German soldier?

**Bill:** Yes and he was absolutely surprised, you know that we were there and he had somebody that he could talk to.

**Rick:** Are there any other combat experiences that you'd like to share?

**Bill:** Well there are probably several. When we went through the Apennines and we went into what they call Poe Valley and that's where it levels out and the Poe River, being one of the largest rivers in northern Italy, came through that area and because of the width of the river and because they had blown a lot of the bridges we had to go across the river in small boats. And I guess, that was part of another specialized army division or army unit that had that.

**Rick:** So they acted like ferry boats?

**Bill:** Yeah they'd hold 15 people or so.

**Rick:** You'd go over and back?

**Bill:** You had to paddle across. But as we went across this one morning, why we got in the middle of the stream and the Germans opened up with their 88 and aircraft guns and they had shells that exploded about 20 feet above the water. And they were firing that and fortunately again in my boat no one was injured but we couldn't get close enough to the shore because of the depth of the water, so we jumped out and waded to shore and we had packs on our back with all the ammunition so some of them just sunk right down to the bottom. And hopefully they came to the surface but I didn't wait to see I just ran, just got to the bank as soon as possible and went up the hill. But in doing that and because we went in these small boats we were separated from our original group. And so we went along the edge of the river and then came upon some vineyards and as we got toward the vineyards, why the Germans had a machine gun emplacement a block away or so, 2 blocks. And when they opened up with that machine gun, why everybody ducked down and got into the ravines and then took cover the best they could. So I crawled toward this old barn that was there and the barn had a blank wall and the machine gun nest was over in this area so there's no way that we could see, you know what the machine gun was doing. So anyway, we found some tools in the barn and knocked a hole in the wall it wasn't really solid just kind of a crumbly type of wall. But we knocked a small hole into it and on my rifle I had a grenade launcher which was a special adapter that you put on the end of the rifle and you put a blank cartridge in the chamber and then a small explosive, I don't know how powerful, but it would shoot 100 yards or some such. So with that hole knocked in the wall, why I fired one shot toward this machine gun nest and it went way short, so I tried again and the 2<sup>nd</sup> time it hit right in the middle of that machine gun nest.

**Rick:** Did you put a grenade in the rifle and then pull the pin and then fire?

**Bill:** No, it was a type of a grenade that would just explode on impact.

**Rick:** So there was no time limit-

**Bill:** No. And I hadn't used it too many times and just by coincidence I happen to have one on my rifle at the time. But anyway, it took out that machine gun nest and so as a result of that, why the troops were able to move forward a lot faster.

**Rick:** How many days to take Belvedere Mountain?

**Bill:** Probably only seven days, seven to ten days.

**Rick:** So when the Germans surrendered this Mount Belvedere where were you and what was your experience?

**Bill:** Well from Mount Belvedere that's when we continued on into the Poe Valley so we went across the Poe Valley and through some of the larger cities and started up into across Lake Garda, which was interesting.

**Rick:** This machine gun incident happened at the Poe Valley after the Germans surrender at Mount Belvedere?

**Bill:** Yes.

**Rick:** Were the Italians welcoming when you went through a village?

**Bill:** Oh yeah, you bet. The people were very anxious to have the Germans evacuate and one other incident happened as we started across the Poe Valley, again I had been separated from my particular company for several weeks. I was riding in a little jeep and going along the road and in front of us were two or three trucks and I thought '*well maybe we can just go past these trucks*'. So as we started to go past them we could see German soldiers up in the trucks and they

were retreating as fast as we were going forward. So we put our rifles on them and said, "*Get out of the trucks*". So we took three truck loads of German soldiers, it must have 30 prisoners, and they were so surprised you know they couldn't believe that we were up there with, right equal with them while we were going forward and they were retreating.

**Rick:** Did they put up any resistance?

**Bill:** No they didn't put up any, no resistance at all, no they didn't. And at that particular point they had run out of gas so they didn't have any gas for their tanks and they were pulling their big artillery pieces with horses.

**Rick:** They had no gasoline?

**Bill:** No, no they didn't. So they took the horses from the farmers.

**Rick:** So they pretty well knew that their number was up didn't they?

**Bill:** They did.

**Rick:** What happened between then and VE Day?

**Bill:** Well from that point on we were going into that Northern Italy part which is really beautiful where Lake Garda and Lake Como and one of our regiments was over on Lake Como. We were at Lake Garda and as we were going around the roadway, the mountain came down and they had to put tunnels going through the mountain. Not long tunnels but you know several hundred feet and they had blown up the one tunnel and so we were trying to go around and in doing so why, again we caught up with the Germans fast enough that they were surrendering. We had hundreds of Germans that were just in a single line walking along the road.

**Rick:** When they surrendered did they just give up their weapons?

**Bill:** Yes, yes at that point they were anxious to, because you know, we treated them good and we put them, of course, in small groups under guard but still none of them tried to cause any...

**Rick:** And you shared your food supply with them?

**Bill:** I'm sure they did. I continued forward so I don't know what happened.

**Rick:** Well then where were you when VE day occurred and what was it like?

**Bill:** So it was just a couple of days after we had gone into this Lake Garda area that the war ended and so after that we just made a camp on one of the small rivers in a little town called *Nazioni*.

**Rick:** Where were you when you heard that the war ended and how did you hear it?

**Bill:** I think that was at the time when we were at Lake Garda and as we went into the small town why the word got around that the Germans had surrendered and so the people were waving their arms and hanging out of windows and just joyous.

**Rick:** How about the GI's, were they doing any celebrating?

**Bill:** Oh they were happy you bet. And after that first day after the war surrendered, we asked some Italian people that offered to let us sleep in their house. So I actually slept in a bed with a mattress on it after several months.

**Rick:** How about taking a bath? Did they let you do that or did they have plumbing in those places?

**Bill:** No, occasionally the army itself had set up areas where you could go and take a shower so you had a shower every two or three weeks.

**Rick:** Well then how long before you were headed home then?

**Bill:** We stayed in this little town from May until about August and at that time the army had given us chances to go on three-day trips. So I went up into the Alps and I had a trip down into Rome and I went to Trieste.

**Rick:** How would you travel?

**Bill:** By truck; and went over into the edge of Yugoslavia even ah *'Utiny'*?

**Rick:** Where would you stay when you traveled?

**Bill:** They had nice places for us. They had good places to stay and rest and good food. So that occupation is a nice part of the Army.

**Rick:** You were there for three months. Then what happened?

**Bill:** So about August we received orders again to evacuate our particular area and we were going to go back to the states. We surmised that we'd be retrained for the Pacific area.

**Rick:** So that was on everybody's mind I guess when you were headed back?

**Bill:** Yes. And going back we had nice boxcars, I mean nice passenger trains you know with bunks and everything.

**Rick:** While you were still in Italy?

**Bill:** Yes just before it ended. So instead of boxcars we had nice passenger trains with seats and bunks.

**Rick:** Well that's pretty nice. And then you got on a ship heading back to New York?

**Bill:** Yes, we boarded ship again at Naples and about the fourth or fifth day out from Naples word came over the PA system on the ship, (and we were all out on the deck sunning ourselves and having a good time), but anyway word came over the loud speakers that the war had ended with Japan. They had surrendered and so everybody was happy and celebrated. So when we got back to the states why they had changed the orders again and they were thinking about dissolving the tenth mountain division.

**Rick:** Let me ask you about that ship going back, was it similar to the one coming over?

**Bill:** It wasn't a big luxury line.

**Rick:** So it was actually worse than what you experienced coming over?

**Bill:** Um, it wasn't a luxury liner but it was a nice ship, I'm trying to think -we had good quarters, yeah. Good food. I think there were far less men on the boat than going over.

**Rick:** And then?

**Bill:** After my furlough at home then I had orders to report to Camp Carson Colorado. There they were reassigning the men who were not eligible for discharge and they did dissolve some of the regiments as I remember.

**Rick:** Where did you land? Did you land right in New York Harbor when you came back to the US?

**Bill:** No we came back to Virginia – Newport News Virginia. It was interesting because as we came into the harbor everybody with a small pleasure craft were running around the harbor and yelling and honking their horns and greeting the troops as they came into the harbor.

**Rick:** Were any loved ones of people on your ship waving there or did they know you were arriving?

**Bill:** No, I doubt that they knew that, no I don't think so. It was just people you know, that were wanting to welcome the troops back.

**Rick:** So then you went on a leave back to your home in Utah then reported back again to Camp Carson?

**Bill:** Yep.

**Rick:** And then you were discharged after that?

**Bill:** No, I still had some months to go before my time was up so I was reassigned to the Presidio in San Francisco. After there, and that's another experience, we were assigned to interview the ships and the troops as they came back from the Pacific. And being stationed in San Francisco, then I was later transferred up to a camp called '*Camp Stoneman*' which was on the Bay about forty miles. From Camp Stoneman we rode a bus into town and met the ships and then the troops got off the ship and got on a ferry and went up the sound, up the river to Camp Carson and from there they got on trains and were dispersed throughout the United States. But we interviewed them and made up reports. That was a good part of that army experience.

Elizabeth: Did you hear about the atomic bombs?

**Bill:** I don't remember specific details about hearing about the atomic bomb.

**Rick:** So, they announced that the Japanese had surrendered and you had a big celebration?

**Bill:** So we were all taken by surprise.

**Rick:** It seems to me that there would be a big feeling of relief that, rather than retraining for further action, you were headed home.

**Bill:** Exactly, we were very happy that we didn't have to go into the Pacific area after Italy.

Elizabeth: Did you have any training; it sounds like you got the bypass sort of mountain training?

**Bill:** I did. The mountain training was all finished when they left Camp Carson and as I mentioned they took away all the equipment, you know all the mountain equipment. The troops over there you know, they had white uniforms and special shoes and boots and gloves and they took all of those.

**Rick:** And gave you the regular khaki stuff.

**Bill:** They gave us the regular khaki uniforms.

**Rick:** Now you said that you skied two times during your service over there. Was that during combat?

**Bill:** Yeah, that same time we were on Mount Belvedere we were given an assignment to send a patrol out and the snow was deep enough that we did use skis to travel several miles.

**Rick:** You go downhill and then cross-country?

**Bill:** Yeah, kind of a cross-country type skiing. But that was the only time and we didn't meet any resistance or any German troops.

**Rick:** The gentleman we talked to earlier said that they were lucky that they didn't meet any German ski patrols because they felt the Germans were better skiers and better equipped. Did you have that same feeling?

**Bill:** Well as I say we didn't even have skis. They only had a few pair which they used on patrol. The terrain was such that you couldn't ski anyway. I mean it was very steep and so the

mountain type warfare for the climbers and all of those experts came in much more handy or much better than the skiing. But again, I skied all my life and so had I had a chance to ski I could've done it.

Elizabeth: So when you see the movies and stuff about all the skiing...

Bill: That was all at Camp Hale.

Rick: They made those movies in Colorado?

Bill: In Colorado, that's where they made all those movies of the Tenth Mountain Division.

Elizabeth: So most of these companies didn't ski, just as you didn't?

Bill: That's right. No most of them did not, no the snow wasn't that deep you know they had a light winter that year.

Rick: So you got there towards the end of the war. The Germans' infrastructure was gone, they had no gasoline and they were more inclined to surrender than fight during those times.

Bill: They wanted to put up as much resistance as possible of course because of their officers but they were ready to surrender. On some occasions I remember there was really no snow on the ground but it was cold and we were going up a roadway and there was a ditch on the one side and we could hear noises and so on and some of the men went down into the ditch and you could hear a few shots being fired and then I could hear motorcycles in the distance being warmed up and they just took off up the road. So there were probably only four or five German soldiers in that area. So you know if they could use motorcycles and so on why, you didn't need skis.

Rick: True, and I don't mean to minimize; war is war.

**Bill:** Absolutely. I was just very fortunate ...being a scout I was always in front of my twelve men.

**Rick:** You were Sergeant?

**Bill:** No, no I was just a Private.

**Rick:** A Private even though you were a squad leader?

**Bill:** I wasn't a squad leader I was just a scout. As a scout I was always in front. That was my position to be the front person and many times as we continued on some of those patrols, when the Germans opened up artillery they fired test rounds. The first round is short, the second round is long and then they fire zero in the middle and many times I could hear those shells going over my head "*ffoo, ffoo, ffoo*" and landing in back of me. I had two or three of the men in the patrol were injured because of that. The bad position being a scout was the rifles and the machine guns.

**Rick:** That was your position the entire time? It seems like that would be more dangerous than anywhere else.

**Bill:** That was my assignment the whole time. It was, yes it was and I remember we had just taken another hill other than this Mount Belvedere and as the forward scout I was given orders to go and dig a foxhole on the forward side of the hill and then observe what was happening. So I went, another fellow and I went, and dug a foxhole and put our packs up on top and toward evening the Germans started firing their artillery shells and they would just go over the hill and on the backside of the hill were the main part of our troops. And we even had a kitchen set up back there to feed the men. But there were two or three men that were killed that particular night with those shells going over and so the Germans had binoculars, I didn't have any binoculars. While we were digging that foxhole they evidently picked up our spot and so they started firing shells into my position and a couple of them hit close enough that they just tore up my pack.

Shredded my knapsack and my pack. But I was deep enough in the hole and I was again, protected. So I've been very blessed by the Lord.

Elizabeth: What was the feeling about the war in Europe prior to Pearl Harbor?

**Rick:** This would be while you were in high school, prior to Pearl Harbor, and then right afterwards. [The United States was drawn into World War II when the Japanese Imperial Navy attacked Pearl Harbor, Oahu, Hawaii on December 7, 1941.]

**Bill:** Well during that period of time and because of the draft and because of everyone being patriotic why everyone was anxious to join in the army or navy ...and all my friends went in the service.

**Rick:** Especially after Pearl Harbor I would think.

**Bill:** Oh sure, after Pearl Harbor.

**Rick:** As a high school student were there factions for, or against the war? I'm curious about the high school mind. There was a big division between those pro to helping Europe verses the isolationists that didn't want to. Was there any debate of that kind at South High?

**Bill:** It wasn't thought of a great deal. I was probably one of the older seniors in high school so I went in the army and a lot of them never did get drafted. No, they were all very patriotic and those that were of age went in the army or the navy without any problems at all, sure. Went in basic training.

Elizabeth: Do you remember hearing about Pearl Harbor?

**Bill:** Oh yes. I was...lets see that was on a Sunday morning and I remember hearing about it and the afternoon two or three of my friends went out and picked apples on somebody's orchard, I mean you just remember on Pearl Harbor day.

**Rick:** Thanks very much for sharing your experiences.