



**Bill Shanley**

United States Army

Private First Class

European Theater

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Eccles Broadcast Center, Salt Lake City, UT

Interviewer:

Rick Randle

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

**Rick:** Will you give us your name and the last rank when you retired from the service?

**Bill:** Bill Shanley, PFC

**Rick:** And you left the service as a PFC in the Army?

**Bill:** Right

**Rick:** Did you grow up in Utah Bill?

**Bill:** More or less, the early part of life I was in Los Angeles, but in Junior High School and High School I was in Utah.

**Rick:** Did you enlist in the service?

**Bill:** My friends were in the National Guard and I joined the Guard a week before they were inducted in the regular army for a year's training. We went in about ten months before Pearl Harbor. I had ten months in when Pearl Harbor happened.

**Rick:** Oh my gosh... so you joined up way before Pearl Harbor happened?

**Bill:** Oh yes. I think if we'd had two months to go, then it would have ended up about four and a half years.

**Rick:** Tell us about basic training and then shipping overseas.

**Bill:** My original basic training was in St. Louis Obispo and that's where I was during Pearl Harbor. And when Pearl Harbor was bombed they shipped a company of us down

to Escondido. That was a field artillery outfit. We got down to Escondido and they formed us into an MP company. We took care of a reservoir—they were scared it was going to be attacked. From there I left to Camp Maxi Texas. We were trained there, and Camp Forrester, Tennessee. From there we shipped overseas. We went to Boston and got on the boat to go overseas.

**Rick:** And then where did you land?

**Bill:** We landed in Glasgow, Scotland and went down to South Wales and we spent seven months in South Wales training for the invasion.

**Rick:** So when did you first learn that you were going to be part of this D-Day invasion?

**Bill:** We knew all along that we were going to be there, but we didn't know when. And at two different times they loaded us aboard ships and they took us out in the English Channel and the next morning they'd bring us back. And the third time they did the same thing only that was the real thing. But we didn't know. Nobody told you. That morning landing crafts started coming back to the ship with wounded, and we knew that was the day.

**Rick:** That was the real thing then?

**Bill:** Yeah.

**Rick:** Tell us about your thoughts when you were in England and training. Did you realize there was a good chance that you wouldn't be coming back, and was there a lot of fear?

**Bill:** I don't remember having any fear. We were just there and training and didn't really think about it.

**Rick:** On that third day out there, tell us about what when on when you finally realized that you were going to go in and what wave were you in? What were your experiences of D-Day?

**Colleen:** Would you start out by explaining what the crafts were like that you were in?

**Rick:** What was your job? What were you trained to do in the D-Day invasion?

**Bill:** I was a motorcycle runner, a motorcycle policeman and the motorcycle was in back of a truck when we made the landing. That's the reason I went in later because I really didn't have much to do.

**Rick:** Tell us your experience in the landing craft and what the craft was like.

**Bill:** That was rough. There was a storm. In fact the invasion was supposed to be the 5<sup>th</sup>, but it was too stormy and they put it off one day, which wasn't much better. And so the ship was rolling around quite a bit and those landing crafts would just bounce up and down like a cork. You had to go down a cargo net to get in them, and you had to watch the landing craft, when it came up as high as it could, that was when you were supposed to get in.

**Rick:** Leaving the big ship, the cargo net was what you climbed down and you had to time it to get in the boat because of the waves?

**Bill:** And if you get too far down the cargo net, that landing craft would just come up and smash them against the side of the ship and they'd just fall in the ocean. Then if you jumped after it started down again then you had that much farther. Some guys broke their legs and that was... it wasn't easy.

**Rick:** So a lot of men were wounded before they even got in the landing craft?

**Bill:** A lot of them didn't even get in the landing craft.

**Rick:** So you were in the landing craft... did you get seasick?

**Bill:** No

**Rick:** Did some of the men?

**Bill:** Yeah, they were sick and heaving on me. The guy behind you might be heaving all over your back because we were in there tight. Then all the time we'd been training, knee-deep in water, and when they went into the shore there and dropped the ramp, the landing craft must have hit a sandbar or something. As soon as the sailors thought they were on the beach, they were ready to get rid of us.

**Rick:** Did you have a big pack?

**Bill:** We had a full field pack. We had life preservers on. If I hadn't have had a life preserver, I probably wouldn't have made it.

**Rick:** So they dropped you off and you were over your head in water trying to get to shore. You were in about 9:30 in the morning?

**Bill:** Between 9 and 10 o'clock and it was pretty rough. We had extra fatigues on. They thought they'd be gas on the beach. They told us wear blouse and pants but we always thought we had to look good. We got in there and when I got up out of the water, I couldn't walk. My pants were full of water. When we got on the beach there was nothing but bodies all over the beach...bodies and parts of bodies. You just had to go around or climb over one to get up on the beach.

**Rick:** Your job was to be a Military Policeman?

**Bill:** Yes... we were in this Engineer Brigade and we were MP Company for that brigade.

**Rick:** When you got on the beach, was there a lot of confusion or did you form with your unit?

**Bill:** We formed up pretty quick but we had to get up off of the beach, there was a minefield. The whole side of the mountain was mined. And they had put paths through the minefield that wide. You'd go single-file. They'd get under machine gun fire and they'd have to change the path. But we got up off the beach and we got up there and we bivouacked that night up off the beach. And the order that night was shoot anything that moved. I mean they thought that the Germans were going to counterattack. So if you hear anything, just shoot. If a guy got up to relieve himself or something and that was just the wrong thing to do.

**Rick:** And that was Omaha Beach that we're talking about right?

**Bill:** Yeah, Omaha Beach.

**Rick:** Since the last 60 years, many historians have felt that the D-Day Invasion was probably one of the most important events in the 20th century. Did you have any idea that you were participating in something that was going to be that momentous?

**Bill:** No. In fact we didn't even think we were being prepared for what we saw when we were down on the beach.

**Rick:** So it was a shock to see all those bodies on Omaha?

**Bill:** And in the first couple of waves hardly anyone made it. They just shot them down. They were up high shooting down.

**Rick:** Did you receive any fire when you landed?

**Bill:** It was just scattered.

**Rick:** What was going through your mind? Did you have any fear when they dropped that landing craft, and you were to charge up there?

**Bill:** No. That was a long time ago. I can't remember having fear. All we wanted to do was get off.

**Rick:** How old were you at the time?

**Bill:** About 19 I guess.

**Rick:** So tell me what happened then after D-Day. You were able to go up and form with your unit?

**Bill:** Yes. We were in that Engineer Brigade we were attached to. Their job was to take care of the beach. So that night we got up and formed the bivouac area and we stayed there for a couple of weeks. We did a lot of traffic control and escorting convoys and stuff like that.

**Rick:** When you're in a landing craft, were you able to look out and see how many ships were coming and going?

**Bill:** Yes. You could look out.

**Rick:** What was that like?

**Bill:** Going in there was occasionally a motor shell. But that was three hours after the first wave, and it was beginning to calm down a bit. But when we got in on the beach,

and got off of the beach and looked back, you could see as far as you could see solid boats and ships.

**Rick:** Did you then advance and break out towards Germany or did you stay there?

**Bill:** We stayed there.

**Rick:** What city were you in.

**Bill:** I was close to St. Lô. We stayed there for a couple or three weeks then we were attached to another outfit and we went up into Antwerp from there. But we stayed right there on the beach for about two to three weeks.

**Rick:** And after that did you have any real combat experiences?

**Bill:** We were in Bastogne, in the breakthrough. When we were in Antwerp, that's when they sent the buzz bombs in.

**Rick:** Lets go back to after you had landed and got into St. Lô and tell us your experiences between there and moving toward Belgium and of course towards Germany.

**Bill:** From that point to Belgium to me is a blank. I mean I have blanks, and there are times where I can't remember how I got to where I was going.

**Rick:** Were the villagers and local citizens glad to see you?

**Bill:** Oh, they treated us pretty good. And the same when Paris was liberated. They wanted the French army to liberate Paris and we weren't supposed to go in there, but some of us did and you can't imagine the treatment we got.

**Rick:** So you were in Paris on the day they liberated it?

**Bill:** Yes, when they liberated it. That was an experience!

**Rick:** Did you walk down the Champs Elysées I guess it is?

**Bill:** We were right in the middle of town. The people went crazy. The American soldier was something special.

**Rick:** I've seen pictures of French girls coming up and hugging the service men and draping them with flowers. Did that happen to you?

**Bill:** Yeah, I had the whole deal, it was quite an experience.

**Rick:** You went on towards Belgium and were in Bastogne prior to the Battle of Bulge?

**Bill:** I had an accident when I first got in that country and I was in the hospital in Bastogne when the breakthrough started. A Lieutenant Colonel came through there and anybody that looked like they could make it on their own... I was laying there with my knee in traction and he looked at me and he just said, "*out!*" Out you went.

**Rick:** They wanted you out of the hospital and on the front line?

**Bill:** They knew the Germans were coming through there and anybody in the hospital that could navigate, they would move them out.

**Rick:** Of course the servicemen held out in Bastogne while they were surrounded and were eventually relieved by Patton breaking through.

**Bill:** I don't remember too much about that. I know it wasn't so much that they went through there, as when they came back. They came back through there moving pretty

fast and they were being chased back, and that's when we had the most problems with them, when they came back.

**Rick:** It was near the end of the war. Tell me any experiences you had from that time until the war ended in Europe.

**Bill:** We went up into Austria and Austria was with Germany, and then towards the end they wanted to change over. So we went over into Austria and they came out cheering and waving and we were told to treat them just like the Germans. And that's another thing—in Germany we were sleeping on the ground, and when we got to Germany they moved the civilians out of their houses and we slept in their houses.

**Rick:** Where were you when victory in Europe was declared?

**Bill:** I was in Linz, Austria.

**Rick:** And what was going through your mind when you heard that.

**Bill:** It was pretty good. I had over a hundred points, which meant that I would go home. If you didn't have over a hundred points they sent you to the Pacific.

**Rick:** So if you had below a hundred points they put you on a ship?

**Bill:** Yes. The only thing is I hurt my leg again and I was suppose to fly home, but I got in the hospital again and by the time I got out of the hospital, I went home on a ship and I missed out on the celebration in New York.

**Rick:** So that happened before you got there because you were sitting on a hospital ship coming back?

**Bill:** We were in Linz, Austria living in an apartment house. We had it pretty good. We didn't have to go home, but everybody wanted to go home. After I got home I thought that maybe it would have been better if I'd stayed there for a while.

**Rick:** Bill, we appreciate very much you coming in today and relating those experiences. There are not very many Utahns around that have had experience of D-Day.

**Bill:** When I was in the service, everybody used to kid me, I was the only one in Utah in the whole army (laughs). I never ran into any body. I guess we were spread out pretty good.

**Rick:** And so if somebody can give us first-hand accounts of what the D-Day invasion is like... Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about the D-Day experience?

**Bill:** One experience I had was, a good friend of mine got married just before we left the states. And that night he was talking and he was pretty down and he was saying that he knew he wasn't going to make it. When we got on the beach that next day we found him and his whole chest was blown out. That night he knew he wasn't going to make it.

**Rick:** Bill, thanks again for coming in. We really appreciate it!