

Transcription

Veteran:
Robert Shannon

Interviewers:
Megan Lawrence
and
Joe DeCecco

Megan Lawrence: This is Mr. Robert Shannon, who was born on November 8, 1923. He served in the Army during World War II. The highest rank he achieved was Technical Sergeant. We are recording in Mr. Shannon's home in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania on November 6, 2010. I am Megan Lawrence and my partner is Joey DeCecco. We are high school students conducting for the Veteran's History Project at the Library of Congress.

Joe DeCecco: What were your parents' occupations?

Robert Shannon: My father worked at Maslund's as a weaver; weaving carpet. My mother, she didn't work.

DeCecco: She lived at home?

Shannon: Yeah.

DeCecco: Ok. How many siblings did you have? Brothers and sisters?

Shannon: I had two sisters and one brother.

DeCecco: Before you entered the military, what were you doing? Were you working?

Shannon: Yeah, let me think... Yeah I was working at Maslund's. As an electrician.

DeCecco: Did any of your siblings go into the military also?

Shannon: My brother, he was in the service.

DeCecco: How did you enter the service? Were you drafted or did you enlist?

Shannon: Yeah, I was drafted.

DeCecco: Can you tell us about the training camp? For example, in the training camp what you did to train for the military.

Shannon: Well, I got in the service and I went to Camp Wheeler, Georgia. That's where we trained. I was in the infantry at that time. Do you know the rest of the story?

DeCecco: No, I don't. Could you tell us?

Shannon: Ok. When I was in the service, I went to Camp Patrick Henry after I left there [Camp Wheeler]. I went to Shenango first, out in the western part of the state and they trained you a little more. Then I went to Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia. The day we were to ship out, I was still in the infantry. The day we were to ship out, everybody was there at the ship to get on it. They called your name and you got on the ship. Ok? Everybody's name was called and I was still standing there. And, the officer there, a Captain, came up to me and said, "What's the matter, aren't you going to go?" I said, "Not till I hear my name called." He said, "Well you just wait here, I'll check." He went in and checked and had no record of me. He had nothing on me. So he said, "I can't take you then, we can't take you. You'll have to go back to Camp Patrick Henry." So I went back, with the vehicles that brought us out, to Camp Patrick Henry. And every day, you were in just a mixed group of people. And everyday they'd give you different jobs: KP, sweeping the streets, or...stuff like that. And I got assigned to the Captain's office to clean the thing up and he had a little radio there, ok? And it wasn't working right; he was hollering about it. And I said, "Do you care if I look at it for you?" He said, "Do you know anything about them?" I said, "I think I do." It just so happened that I just turned a couple little IF screws in there, and the thing played perfectly. He said, "My God, you don't belong in the infantry. You should be in the Signal Corp.!" I said, "Yeah, that's what I'd like to be in." He said, "Well I'm going to see what I can do for you." So, I think it was that day or...that afternoon or the next day, I forget, but he had come over to see me. He said, "There's a group there, of twelve men that are shipping out, and the one man just wound up in the hospital, and if you can take Morse Code, we can put you in that." So he said that they're going to give me a test on it. So they gave me a test, and I was sending with a guy with a telegraph key; Morse Code. And I started sending, and he said "Oh my! I can't take it that fast. You're what I need." So I got with

this outfit, and there was only twelve men in it. And when we went over to Europe, we landed in Africa. Casablanca. And we went to Algiers. We had two brand new Plymouth Sedans for the twelve men and we had VF equipment on it. I don't know if you know what that is or not; It's direction finding equipment. It's a loop antennae on the roof and you can sit in the back seat and tune in the radio. And you turn that, and two of you work it. I mean like, part one car would be here, and another in the town or somewhere else. And they both monitor the same thing, and when you hit it, it would make a knoll, you know. And we would know exactly where the house was, or where they were transmitting from. And then we were to notify the military, and they were to go in and capture them. That was the mission. I had a friend, my partner was Joe Attarti. He was ^{from} New York. He and I were on a mission, and we located a place where they were broadcasting from. And we shouldn't have, I mean I didn't do it, but he went in, and he thought he could take it himself. And when he did, they shot him and he was killed. So my partner was killed. And then after that, I wound up repairing the radios and stuff like that for the outfit.

DeCecco: Since you were in the counter intelligence, was there any special training that you had to go through?

Shannon: Not after that. No.

DeCecco: Was it hard adapting to military life, with the barracks and the food and all the physical activity?

Shannon: It wasn't bad, but...

DeCecco: It was different?

Shannon: Yeah. It was different, yeah. We had pretty good meals because there was only a few of us and then we were assigned to different outfits. You know, 849 Signal Intelligence. We went with them for a while. And that was mostly our missions. And I thought I was lucky because the outfit I went in the service with, the infantry gig, they were mostly all wiped out. And there was only a couple of them left. So I thought I was lucky to get in that.

Lawrence: When you were talking about the KP... What is KP?

Shannon: Don't you know what KP is? That's kitchen help; washing dishes or maybe peeling potatoes! Stuff like that.

Lawrence: How did you notify the guys that went to take out the people that you found with the radio signals?

Shannon: We'd go to them and tell them. We didn't radio them.

Lawrence: What can you tell me about Casablanca? What was it like there?

Shannon: Lot of Arabs and a lot of sheep and stuff like that.

Lawrence: Same thing with Algiers?

Shannon: Algiers is a little bigger city. That was more modern. And I met a lot of nice people there. We lived in the second floor of a building right beside a park. Almost every day, this little girl would come - she was about nine years old - her name was Bridget. And she would come there and we would give her some of our PX rice. And we would buy her candy. And she could speak perfect English - her mother was English and her dad was French. The reason I know is because one day she came down and she had her mother with her. And her mother invited a couple of us up to her house and she said that she would make us and chicken dinner if we could find her a chicken. So one day we were driving around and we found a place that they had chickens, and we got this little chicken and we took it to her house. Sunday was the day she was going to have us over to eat. And she served the head of the chicken - the head! - on a plate to me. I told her that we don't eat the heads; I eat the white meat! She was sorry you know. And they had real good wine and stuff like that. But that's the way it went.

Lawrence: Did you go anywhere after Africa?

Shannon: I went from there up to Sicily and then on up into Rome. And I spent a lot of time there in Rome.

Lawrence: What did you do when you were off duty?

Shannon: Oh I don't know...I'd go to a park and sit on a bench. And then I met a family there - I was sitting on a bench reading a newspaper that we had in English and these people came up to me and asked me if they could talk to me. Their daughter would like to speak to me - she's learning English. And she did pretty good. And then I got to be friends with them and they invited me to their house. I was there I don't know how many times! Boy, that woman was a good cook and made really good stuff to eat!

Lawrence: While you were in Africa - I was researching - what is Operation Torch?

Shannon: I don't know. Sorry.

Lawrence: How did you stay in touch with family and friends back home?

Shannon: Oh. With V-Mail. You don't know what V-Mail is? It's a piece of paper that said V-Mail on it and you wrote a letter on it. And when you folded it and sent it, they took a picture of it - about like that - and sent it to your home. And I got mail too - Oh I got a lot of mail. I was married at the time. I was married right before I went in to the service. Me and my wife got an allotment. Every month, she got 50 dollars every month. And 50 dollars was a lot of money - it was a significant amount you know. And that's what she got.

DeCecco: Alright, so when the war ended, where were you?

Shannon: When the war ended over there in Europe, we come back to Fort Mammoth, New Jersey. And they gave us a two week vacation or furlough. To come home. And while I was home, the Japanese war ended. So when I was home, I was supposed to go back to Fort

Mammoth and we were supposed to go over to Japan. But the war ended so we just went back to Fort Mammoth and that's where I was discharged from.

DeCecco: And then when you got home, was it hard to readjust to civilian life?

Shannon: It didn't take me long!

DeCecco: After the war was over, did you stay in contact with the friends that you met in the military?

Shannon: Yeah I..a couple of them. I don't know what happened to them.

DeCecco: You just lost touch. And are you a member in any veteran's organizations?

Shannon: I belong to the American Legion. I belong to the Veteran's Foreign War. The VFW. And I go over there every Sunday night down at the Vet's. That's what I do. Yeah.

Lawrence: How have your wartime experiences affected your life?

Shannon: How has it affected my life? Well I was glad to get out and get back. There was no change. I don't know. I thought I was very lucky to be in that because when you're in the infantry, stripes are hard to get. And as soon as I get over there, they put me in this outfit and I got to be a T-5. That was a corporal. And then I got a T-4 after that.

Lawrence: Did you learn any life lessons while you were in the military?

Shannon: I don't know.

Lawrence: What would you like people to know about the war or about your service?

Shannon: That I was glad to get out and get back home! War is hell - I'll tell ya!