

November 16, 1923:

I, Robert Shannon, was born to a carpenter and stay-at-home mother.

1942:

I was drafted into the United States Army. I was very, very nervous! But also part of me was unbelievably honored and excited to be serving my beautiful country. I was now known as Private Shannon.

About 15 weeks later:

I was sent to three training camps. The first one wasn't too bad - that was Fort Indiantown Gap, PA for development. Then came the real training: Camp Wheeler, Georgia. Thirteen weeks of basic training in the hot Georgia sun wasn't exactly the best thing in the world. When my training was finally over, I was sent to Camp Patrick Henry in Virginia. Before I knew it, the boat was leaving for Europe and we all got in trucks that took us down to the loading docks. I waited and waited and waited to hear my name called to get on the boat, but it never happened! I was so surprised and so I went to see what was wrong. My papers were non-existent! I was sent back to camp with another unit.

Not too long after that, I just happened to be assigned to clean the Captain's quarters. It was a boring old job until something extraordinary happened. It was just my perfect luck that the Captain's radio wouldn't work and I was able to fix it! My captain was notified and about a day later he told me that I was extra special and that I should not be in the infantry; I should be in the Signal Corps. Also, I was made Corporal. These were the most exciting bits of news I'd had in a long time and I was thrilled! I was given a Morse Code test and passed easily and was assigned to a twelve man outfit. I then found out that my signaling partner was Joe Attarti from New York. We became fast friends.

A 13 day voyage across the Atlantic Ocean:

Ugh. A boat. For thirteen days! I was relieved to be off the boat and on dry land - even if it was African land. Yes, we landed in Casablanca, Morocco, Africa. Our assignment was to

locate enemy radio transmitting stations. We were given two new cars, DF antennas, and fairly good food. The food was always important after being in training camp for so long! Four men would go out in our cars and monitor all the frequencies that we could find. If we found one, we were supposed to report where it was coming from so the infantry could "take care of it." I had a pretty good idea what that meant: the infantry would take out the transmitters and get rid of the enemy, but I tried not to think about it from that perspective. I kept telling myself that it was important to win the war and the way to do that was by reporting the locations we found. At times, we would be working late in small towns and cities and sometimes got locked in the city for the night. There were gates around entrances and exits of the cities. We would have to stay in the city until morning when we would be let out.

Algiers:

Apparently my outfit had matured. We were sent to Algiers. The days started to blur together. Every day was hot - and I mean really hot! Technically we were part of the Counter Intelligence Corp and therefore were only to report the locations of enemy signaling we found...most days were uneventful for us but one day in particular sticks out in my mind. My partner, Joe, who was one of my closest friends, and I were out roaming around looking for signals. We happened to be very close to an enemy unit. Joe decided that he was going to go into the place and take out the men inside by himself. I begged him not to do it but he wouldn't listen to me. He was going against our orders. I watched but Joe never came back out of the building. He was shot and killed that night. This was the hardest thing that I ever had to go through. I was devastated. I still, to this day, wish I would have never let him go in that building.

On a lighter note, I still love the people I met in Algiers. There was this little nine year old girl named Bridget that spoke English to us. I was so surprised when she first opened her mouth the first time. I mean, we were in Africa for goodness sake! That's at least 3000 miles from home! Anyways, Bridget would come over to me and my buddies looking for any little treats we were able to give to her. We were all pretty generous. She had us wrapped around her little finger as little girls tend to do. What can I say? She was cute, friendly, and a reminder of home. Eventually, we learned that Bridget's mother and father were very well off. They owned the only Ford Motor Company agency in the whole country. One time, we bought a chicken for

Bridget's mother to cook. They invited a few of us to their gorgeous, immense house for chicken dinner. I was surprised to find out that their house was complete with guard rails and a gate. I wasn't expecting anything like that around a house in Africa. During the meal, I had the most peculiar experience! Bridget's mother served me the head of the chicken! She just plopped it right down on my plate to my amazement. She was so sorry after I had said that I don't eat the head; that I only eat the white meat.

Later:

It was now nearing what would become the end of the war. My outfit was sent to Bofaurick, Africa. It wasn't much different than Casablanca except that it was considered a tent city that held the necessary monitoring materials that we needed. We listened to and monitored all the radio signals and codes all day, every day. It was somewhat of a boring task to do, but I reminded myself that it was better than being in the infantry. I received more exciting news in Bofaurick though; I was promoted to the rank of T-4 Sergeant. This meant that I was a radio mechanic.

I was then sent to Rome and Milan, Italy. Italy looked a bit more like home than Africa and it made me homesick. I couldn't get my wife out of my head when I looked at all the shops. Though some of them were closed, they still reminded me of her. She loved to shop. I hoped that I would be home with her soon. Her V-mails gave me the strength to go on and continue my job. In Rome, I was set the task of fixing radios and deciphering coded messages. In Milan, however, there was a bit more excitement. Where I was stationed at a signal base, there was an air raid nearly every night. It was very scary having to take shelter underground every night. I knew we were safer there than anywhere and that the raids were most likely our allies, but it was still frightening. Most of the men hardly got any sleep in Milan. We were all exhausted from staying alert all day and night. Looking back now, I think the exhaustion led to my getting the flu. I think my immune system was tired and weak as well as my body and fighting spirit. I spent a few weeks away from my comrades in the hospital. The hospital was much worse than any of my bases and I was so happy to get back to base. I never again thought my job was boring or menial. During my recuperation period back on base, I had a few extra days off each week instead of working nearly every day. On my days off, I liked to sit in the local parks. Most

days it was fairly warm. The air was refreshing and healing. My favorite part of the parks was watching all of the locals going about their business and trying not to be affected by the war.

One day, a woman approached me and asked me an honoring question. She asked if I would read to her young daughter so that her daughter would pick up on the English language. I said I would of course. The woman later told me that her husband had been killed in the Italian army and that she was sick of the war. I hoped that he wasn't killed because of me. The guilt that hung over me was replaced by gratitude when she invited me to dinner on Sunday nights. The woman made the best meals I had ever eaten. While in Milan, I was given a motorcycle. Getting gasoline, however, was a problem. One of my comrades painted it military green for me, and low and behold, I was able to get gas! I used to like to give the little girl I read stories to in English, a ride around town. It's one of my favorite memories.

Going home 1945:

After Germany surrendered, we were sent home for a few weeks of rest and to see our families. I was stationed at Fort Mammoth in New Jersey but I was very close to home. By borrowing my father's car, I was able to come home on the weekends and visit my wife. She was ecstatic to see me home so often. Thankfully by September when my unit was getting prepared to be shipped to Japan, the Japanese surrendered. We were so relieved that we decided to go out and party that night! A few weeks later after the party, my outfit and I were discharged for good. We were able to finally return to our families and start our lives at home since World War II was over!