

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with

JOHN GILL

Combat Medic, 2d Infantry Division, Europe, World War II

1995

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Gill, John A., (1925-). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (126 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound Cassette (126 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Gill, a Madison, Wis. native discusses his World War II service in Europe as a litter bearer with Company C, 2nd Medical Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division. This is a very detailed and often revealing account of combat situations like the aftermath at Omaha Beach, Hill 192, Saint Jean, and St. Lô. Gill describes his voyage overseas, training in Northern England, and daily life on the battlefield. He details the evacuation process and the problems encountered due to hedgerows and sunken roads in France. He touches upon GI's feelings toward Germans and religion. He talks about being wounded, hospitalized in England, and discharged. He comments on his use of the GI bill, disability pension, and membership in veterans groups.

Biographical Sketch

Gill (b. May 4, 1925) served as a combat medic with Company C, 2nd Infantry Division in France during World War II. Gill was wounded in August of 1944 and received a disability discharge in 1945.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs staff, 1998.

Transcription edited by David S. DeHorse, and Abigail Miller, 2002.

Interview Transcript

Mark: Today's date is February 23, 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. John Gill of Madison, a veteran of the European Theater in World War II.

Mark: Good morning Mr. Gill, how are you doing?

Gill: Fine, thank you.

Mark: Good. I suppose the place to start would be at the beginning. I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about where you were born and a little bit about you're up bringing. What were you doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941?

Gill: I was born May 4, 1925 in Dubuque, Iowa. My dad had a small clothing store there. It was during the Depression, he had bought on in Madison and the one in Madison was doing better so he decided to come to Madison. So I came to Madison when I was six years old, I have lived here ever since. I went to Saint in grade school I graduated from there in 1939. In 1943 I went to Edgewood, I graduated in June of that year. I was drafted into the army on August 1943 where I went to Camp Grant which is a reception center. I was put into the medics because I wore glasses. That was a limited service type of thing. I took my basic training at Camp Grant I was there until the end of January or maybe I guess it was the end of February. I went overseas to Europe on about the 1st of March. I went over on the Queen Mary; it had eighteen thousand troops on it. We sailed from New York to Scotland, we landed at the--I went from Glasgow to a replacement depot in England and I was there until some time in April. I was sent as a replacement medic to the Second Infantry division. Which was stationed in South Wales and was preparing for the invasion of Europe.

Mark: Let's backtrack a little bit. You finished high school in 42 or something?

Gill: 1943 I finished High School.

Mark: How long after graduating high school were you drafted?

Gill: Well lets see it would be June, July, and August about three months.

Mark: Did you, as an 18 year old in the middle of a war, I'm sure you realized that this was a likely situation that you would get drafted. How did you feel about that?

Gill: I actually wanted to go into the service because all my friends were going in at that time. So I didn't mind I was young and it was a big adventure to me.

Mark: Where were you actually inducted? Where did you take the oath?

Gill: In Camp Grant in Rockford, Ill.

Mark: Could you describe to me some of your basic training, how long did it last, what sort of training did you do, how much of it was in the classroom, how much of it was in the field, how much weapons training did you have that sort of thing.

Gill: I would say roughly that half of it was in the field otherwise we learned how to bandage, how to give shots, how to set splints and pretty much basic medical service. We had a lot of marches, we had I remember it was January we camped out for a week it was pretty cold. I didn't mind the hikes at all and the marches and different things. But some of the guys that were 37, 38 years old they had a hard time adjusting to it.

Mark: This brings up a topic I wanted to ask you about anyway; that is about some of the other men with whom you trained. I was wondering; if you could describe some of the backgrounds that they came from? Were they all Mid Westerners or did they come from all different parts of the country their ages?

Gill: I don't remember all of them but I remember one who was a reporter for one of the Rockford papers, he was really out of shape. Whenever we went on marches somebody usually helped him to carry his equipment. It seemed that most everybody that was there at basic training was from the immediate area. They were mostly Mid Westerners I would say. But we did have some of the Sergeants and Corporals were from the south.

Mark: They were the old army guys.

Gill: They were seemed to be the guys that had been in a long time. We had to keep the barracks real neat, we had inspections where they would come in with the white gloves and reach up where the heat ducts were to see if there was any dust. You had to have your bed so tight that a quarter would bounce off of it. Your footlocker had to be absolutely neat.

Mark: Did you adjust well to this? Cause I remember when I was in basic training some people couldn't handle that sort of thing. I imagine that there were some.

Gill: I didn't mind at all. I met a good friend, a fellow his name was Charles Bushelaki he was a golden gloves boxer. I got to know him and several others that I liked very much. So the adjustment wasn't real hard. I remembered coming back to Madison and I liked that part, being close to home I could get home. I remember one night I hitched hiked back from Rockford and I got half way between Rockford and Madison I couldn't get a ride any farther so I had to hitch hike back to Rockford, because I could only get a ride that way. The next day I think I took a bus.

Mark: Were there a lot of older guys like you mentioned before or were there a lot of 18 year old kids like you? What was the age?

Gill: I would say that there was a mixture of probably more young guys I would say than older ones. Two classmates of mine came through one were Frank Eagan and one Jim Flat. He was the son of the architect, he was in the first division which landed on D-Day so which I didn't know at the time that he was in, but I found out later. He was wounded in Normandy and he was killed in Ogden. He was the only one from my high school class that was killed during the war.

Mark: That probably was a remarkable record for the greatest war in history?

Gill: The majority of my 1943 class from Edgewood was in the service. I know one friend of mine Jack Hugh's was signed up for the Air Force in the springtime. They said they would let him finish high school but they never did. They called him in about two three months before he was to graduate. They sent him to bombardier school. He was made a second Lieutenant at the age of 18.

Mark: Pretty heavy stuff at the age of 18?

Gill: He was a pretty young second Lieutenant.

Mark: You went overseas fairly soon after you finished training then?

Gill: Yeah. The training ended in either January or February. I remember that I wrote down that we went overseas on the Queen Mary in March of 1944.

Mark: Describe the Queen Mary to me. It sounds like an interesting experience for an 18-year-old kid?

Gill: There were eighteen thousand troops on board. We didn't go in a convoy because the ship was too fast. We would have been slowed down by a convoy. We went the northern route up around Iceland that way. One of the things that the ship did was it zigzagged every six miles they would slightly turn the boat, that was to avoid torpedo's. I was so seasick the entire way that I only went to lunch one time. You would go up one deck walk the length of that deck and go up another stairway to another deck and walk the length of that. When I got up to the top there were counters that you could stand at to eat. There had been many guys who had eaten there before and there was all this food on the counters and the boat was swaying. I just got in the line going back down to my bunk downstairs. The food that we got we bought from English Sailors, they sold us roast beef sandwiches we paid a quarter for them. But I didn't eat a whole lot, in fact we had a torpedo drill and I was supposed to be the medic and supposed to help and be around in case of any casualties. I was so seasick that I didn't even go to the drill. I was kind of hoping that the boat would be sunk I felt so terrible. I had the green heaves throwing everything up in your stomach.

Mark: I'm sure you weren't the only one seasick. How prevalent was this?

Gill: It was pretty bad because when you would go in the hall ways there was stuff from the other guys had thrown up in the hall ways. There was prevailing smell. We were down pretty low in the Queen Mary it was down where all the pipes were and the heating ducts. There were bunks that were four or five high that we slept in. I remember even after we landed when I would turn on water I just sway at the faucet for some reason. A few times I got up on deck and the Queen Mary was huge ship that normally doesn't roll very much but the ocean was this was March and probably the roughest time of the year. You could look down at the water at an angle and see it. I do love the water I sail and swim all the time. But I'm not good on Merry- Go- Rounds or on ships.

Mark: I take it this was your first overseas voyage. The first trip over the ocean?

Gill: Yeah, it was the first time. I did have another ride on the Queen Mary in 1952 I went over with another friend of mine. I was seasick on that trip too, but not as bad. When we got to England I was glad to get off the boat. I actually didn't want to come back. I wanted to stay there if I had to come by ship.

Mark: So, then you went to replacement depot?

Gill: Yes.

Mark: Do you remember if it was in Wales, you said?

Gill: No, it was in Northern England I think. It's hard for me to remember the exact spot. The town of Chester kind of rings a bell a little bit. I guess if I looked back at some of my notes I might have it in there.

Mark: You were in this place how long?

Gill: Just a few weeks. We did a lot of marching. They were trying to get us physically in shape. We had machine gun that we crawled underneath. They had simulated bombshells that went off. We had a lot of that kind of training. I don't remember too much about that. I guess I remember more about after I joined the Second Division in Wales. It was a nice town called Tempri it was on the coast. I remember going into that on pass it had very wide beaches. When the tide was out it was at least a block or more. It was kind of a resort town normally like Wisconsin Dells. At this particular time it was closed off. The civilians had been moved out of a lot of these coastal towns the army had taken them over.

Mark: I was going to ask if you got to meet any English people or Welsh people?

Gill: I really didn't get to meet I don't think any because we couldn't leave camp. We were pretty much restricted to camp at this particular time.

Mark: When you were in Wales once you got hooked up with the Second Division and you were in Wales what sort of training did you do then?

Gill: We had more of the marching more of the simulated combat. The division that I had joined had taken training in Camp McCoy. They did not parachute but they were landing with airplanes, ski training at Camp McCoy and they were kind of a Texas Division to begin with. Most of these guys or a lot of the guys were Mexican Americans because of its origin down there. It's an old division but during World War 1 it had the most casualties of any of the divisions they probably participated in more combat than any of the other divisions. I guess you could say that about the Korean War too. They had six or seven thousand killed and almost ten thousand wounded in that particular war. It was kind of old-line division. When they went overseas they were in Ireland, they came from Ireland to South Wales but they had training there for almost a year.

Mark: It was in this division that you got to mingle with people from many different parts of the country, different ethnic origins and those sorts of things?

Gill: Yeah right.

Mark: Was that an interesting experience? Was there any tension between the different groups? Did everyone seem to get along?

Gill: No, I got along well with the Mexican Americans and with everybody else that was there. I've never had a problem getting along with people. I usually get along pretty easily.

Mark: The reason I ask is there are some vets not all of them but a few say for example there were some Southerners who were still fighting the Civil War, that kind of thing.

Gill: No. I ran into some southern hillbillies. They did a lot of swearing, about every third word was a cuss word I don't think they could talk unless they could put a swear word in. They were pretty tough, I remember one that I met in the hospital later and he ran into a German with a machine pistol. He got about five wounds across his stomach. Normally that would kill anybody but there he was still going at it.

Mark: I'm sure you had to realize that an invasion of Europe was going to come fairly soon?

Gill: Yeah, there was a lot of talk in fact everything was in the newspapers at this time that was all you ever heard was talk about the second front. We knew and had a pretty good idea that we were going to take part in it. I was only a private at the bottom rung of the ladder. They don't tell you anything about what's going on so you are the last one to learn. Except we did know that the invasion was coming up.

Mark: No I understand that. I'm just interested in the scuttlebutt as they say in the navy, what the GI's talked about, what there perception about what was going to happen.

Gill: I think everybody thought the landing was going to be in France but they didn't know where. We actually didn't know until we were on the ship in the channel. Some body said that the landing was in Normandy. I had never heard of Normandy before in my life, I never had paid any attention to it. I knew where France was but I didn't know exactly where Normandy was. On D-Day we heard that the landing had taken place there.

Mark: Now, you were where at the time of the actual D-Day June 6th you were not in Wales any more I take it?

Gill: No, we left Wales, I've got two notices in my records one saying we left the 28th of May. The other one says we left the 3rd of June. But I think the one that says the 28th of May because we left Cardiff and Swansea. I can remember being on the ship for at least a week. We were in the Bristol Channel and we had traveled very slowly it was calm I wasn't seasick. It seemed like a one of those boats or freighters like Chrysler put together. The Liberty Ship it was kind of a ship like that but not a real big one. I think it probably had two or three thousand men on the ship.

Mark: It just kind of went along the coast?

Gill: We went along the coastline and they probably went at a slow speed. The division that I was in was to be the first back up troops for the First in twenty-nine Divisions that landed on D-Day. So we had to be all set up to land as soon as possible, so we had to be at sea. At the time I didn't know all this, but I have learned it since from reading,

Mark: So, on the June the 6th then you were on the boat off the coast in Southern England some where. Did you have any indication that the invasion had started?

Gill: Yeah, you could see all the ships, there were ships all around us. You could see planes constantly flying over head. We also heard over the ships loud speaker, that D-Day had occurred. And we heard that on the 4th of June that Rome had fell to the allies. We were scheduled to get off the 8th of June. We didn't get up on deck a whole lot because there were quite a few troops on board. Also they thought it was safer in case there were any staffing from German planes they probably didn't want a lot of troops on the deck. But I don't remember any bombing at all.

Mark: What is the mood on the ship? Especially after you know the invasion has started. Is it excitement, is it fear?

Gill: Everybody was excited. I think that one of the things that we all didn't know what to expect. I knew it was going to be quite dangerous. I didn't know how dangerous, if I had read about the Second Division in World War One and all the casualties that they

had suffered I would have been a lot more scared. But it was kind of a combination of fear and excitement at being there. It was one of the greatest adventures of all time. So I guess that was pretty much my premising thought at the time. I imagine that the guys in the infantry felt a little worse. Being a medic I wasn't sure how close I would be to the front.

Mark: Yeah. With a big cross on your helmet I take it.

Gill: Yeah, and an armband.

Mark: Describe for me if you would, your landing at Omaha Beach?

Gill: We were scheduled to get off on the 8th of June. Parts of the division got off on the 7th of June. I talked with this fellow from Mineral Point and that's when he got off along with this friend of mine from Texas. But we didn't get off till June 9th it was a Friday. They got us up at 5:00 in the morning and we sat there until 10:00. Everybody was gripping about why we got up so early. I remember climbing down one of these rope ladders. The ship was out about four miles from shore. There was a battle ship to the right, I can't remember now but I have it written down it was either the Arkansas or the Texas. They were shelling the inland; the shells were so big that you could see them being projected. I don't know how far they were firing inland but it was quite away. There didn't seem to be a whole lot of firing on the beach from what you could see four miles away. We could hear explosions, but it turned out that it was the engineers that were blowing up the mines that were on the beach and other obstacles that were in the way. We climbed down a rope ladder and got into a small landing craft. The boat stopped in about waist deep water and we got out. There was no firing on the beach and it was quite. There were a lot of rocks, not real small rocks but they were about two inches wide and two or three inches high. They were very loose rocks and when you would step on them they moved like gravel. We were dressed for the possibility of a gas attack. We wore long underwear, heavy woolen army ODs and fatigues over that. All of this had been treated to keep gas from coming through. So we were very hot it was in June and it was warm. One of the first things that we did was to take off our gas masks and throw them into a big pile. Shortly after we got on the beach I noticed that there weren't any dead bodies. I understand that they had been cleared away and there were an awful, lot them. The guys that had landed on the sub told me that there were bodies all over the place. By this time they had picked them all up. I think they did that so that the guys coming to shore wouldn't be too scared. We followed a narrow path that was marked with tape up to Omaha Beach. There were tension mines that the Germans had put up right in this area. This one path was cleared of mines and every body was using it because the whole beach hadn't had the mines taken out just yet. There was a lot of wreckage on the beach. But there didn't seem to be a whole lot of activity, I was surprised at the lack of activity.

Mark: Could you hear firing in the distance?

Gill: The only thing that we heard were these explosions that kept going off. We found out that it was our own engineers that were blowing up these mines. The guys who landed on the 7th of June said that there was a lot of sniper fire and there were little pockets of Germans that they had to clear out. But that had been taken care of by the time I had landed. I was with company C the Second Medical Battalion. There were forty litter barriers all together. That was about twelve per battalion and there were one or two guys with the aid station. The evacuation process kind of started with the litter barer. We worked from where the front was to where the fighting was then back to the battalion aide station. The second step of an evacuation was then to take the casualty to a collecting station. Which was all part of the Second Medical Battalion. The collecting station was maybe a mile or so in back of the front line. The battalion aide station was as close to the front as they could get it. But it had to be close to a road to get an ambulance in. But in Normandy there were so many hedgerows and sunken roads that a lot of the times they couldn't get the ambulance right up to the battalion aide station. After the collecting station the next stop was a clearing station. Where each of these steps of evacuation processes a casualty would get more care. When we picked up somebody we gave them the very minimum of care, the doctor at the aide station gave the very minimum of care and so on each step they would get a little more care. We had more doctors back at the collecting station. The clearing station was another place where they got more care. Finally there was like a mash unit like a hospital.

Mark: Lets talk about evacuation procedures.

Gill: I guess I kind of described the evacuation process, so I will get back to where we were. I was walking with this group of forty Medics. We walked until about 12:00 noon then went off this road that we had been walking on. I would say we had walked maybe a couple miles roughly, we were going to Omaha Beach. It was kind of a high ridge because Omaha Beach was high. We went into a field and stopped there. We were broken up into groups of twelve. I was one of the Medics that were assigned to the 3rd Battalion, so for the rest of the time I was in Normandy I would go with them. Whenever they would attack I would be with the 3rd Battalion. If they were in reserve I would be in reserve unless I was called out to help. But normally I was always with the 3rd Battalion. The 38th Regiment was scheduled to attack at 12:00 noon on the 9th of June. The objective was this little town of Tr`evi`eres, which was just a few miles inland from Omaha Beach. I remember walking behind the infantry, we were told to just follow them. They were probably half a block in front of us. There wasn't a whole lot of firing at first very little they just kept walking slowly. Evidently the Germans had pulled back. We came to a low hill that we went down, I would say it was maybe 75 feet or 100 feet higher than the rest of the area, but rather steep. One our small tanks started to go down and it was shot at. He immediately backed up and went back up the hill and got out of the way. We got to the bottom of this little hill and we came across our first casualty. I remember he was a fellow that had a slight head wound, it wasn't very serious but he was bleeding. He was able to walk and we told him where the aide's station was and we told him where Omaha Beach was. So we sent him back in that

general direction. Then we came across more casualties. There was a little river the Aura River. This river wasn't very wide probably about six feet across. Our infantry had gone across that and were on the other side and they were fighting with the Germans. The Germans seemed to have bicycles, you couldn't see to many because there were hedgerows in the way. These hedgerows were really old, they had started out as rock fences built by the Kilts many centuries ago. Over time they had grown to six to eight to ten feet high and were full of bushes and trees. One of the things that the army had neglected to do was to train the infantry to fight in this kind of hedgerow country. It was kind of a complete surprise. It gave real good defensive cover for the Germans. I was surprised that somebody had told me that there were thirty nine hundred of these in an area square mile. So you can get an idea of how concentrated they were. The Germans were able to pull back from one hedgerow to the another. I remember evacuating more serious casualties over the river. At the base of the hill there was one of our medical jeeps. We would take the casualties to the jeep and put them on. From there they were taken back to Omaha Beach to get more treatment. Over there in Normandy, they had double daylight saving time. It didn't get dark until about 11:00, then things really got quite, everything kind of stopped, not a whole lot of noise. We didn't go through the town of Tr`evi`eres the 3rd Battalion that I was with went to the right of it, so I never got into the town myself. At that time I didn't know what the objective was they never told us. They said just follow the infantry so I didn't know about Tr`evi`eres until after the war when I did some more reading about what had happened there. We went to sleep that night at oh we stopped at 11:00. We had one casualty with us, he had a leg wound and it didn't seem too serious. One of the guys who was with me; Sidney Harris bound his leg right to the litter so it wouldn't move. We went to sleep that night. I remember lying there by the hedgerow we were still kind of wet from crossing the river it was cold and it got down to about 60 maybe a little lower than that it never got real, real warm in Normandy. We were cold quite often because we didn't have any blankets or anything to put on at night. But lying there you could look up and see the channel it was two or three miles away. Not the channel it's self, but the Germans were bombing at some of the ships not a whole lot of German planes but a few. You could see the anti aircraft fire in the sky. The sky just lights up like a giant Fourth of July. I think everyone of those five thousand ships, were firing, into the air. They probably got more casualties from shells falling down on people than from actually being hit by any German planes. It was quite a sight to see. It was a little bit hard to sleep with all this excitement that had been going on.

Mark: Were you scared?

Gill: Yeah, I was pretty scared by now. After you see the casualties you become frightened. One of the things I remember was one of our shells that had evidently had gone into the ground. I saw it sticking up it had a bright copper casing. We hadn't been fired upon by any German artillery at this point. There might have been a few shells but I don't remember. Small arms fire by the Germans but not a whole lot. In this first day compared to what was to come was a rather easy day I think for the infantry and for us too. I don't think they suffered a lot of casualties either. But the next day the 38th

Regiment captured this town of Tr`evi`eres. They were given two Presidential Unit Citations, I think this was one of the easiest battles they had in the entire campaign. They never got any Unit Citations after that. They went through the Battle of the Bulge and many other battles that were much more severe. But I suppose the reason they got the citations was that Tr`evi`eres was one of the first towns that was captured. They were so anxious to expand Omaha Beach that they gave them this award for it.

Mark: So, after your first day how did things change?

Gill: I remember about the 12th of June, they said there might be a possibility of an attack by some of the German tanks by their armor divisions. I heard and read later that the crucial day on D-Day was not going to be D-Day but the third day. They said the reason for that is by that time they would have had a chance to bring up their armor divisions and attack. One of the things I remember is trying to dig a foxhole in back of a big tree. This other fellow that I was with, thought that we wouldn't get ran over with this big tree in front of us by a tank. But we couldn't dig down into the ground because of the roots of the tree. So we dug down two or three inches and then we quit and slept there for the night. It turned out that we didn't have a tank attack after all. One of the reasons for that was Hitler hadn't released his armored division to come to Normandy. He thought the attack was going to be in the Paddy Calais area and secondly our airforce was so active that it was impossible for the Germans to bring out many of their tanks or infantry. One other tough division that was there was the 352nd Division, they were at Omaha Beach. They hadn't expected them to be there. One of the divisions that came over was 3rd Parachute Division that had been in Brittany they came over after a few days. After the 12th we moved inland pretty good without any opposition at all. It was a matter of marching on the road until the 16th of June. We got near Saint Lô and we came to this hill, which I learned later was Hill 192. They called it that because it was 192 meters above sea level. This was a hill that over looked Saint Lô which was an important rail road hub and road hub in Normandy. From the top of the hill you could see all the way to the channel. The Germans had a strategic advantage in occupying this hill. It wasn't real steep like Bascom Hill, but it was long and gradual. It was full of hedgerows, it was a good defensive position to have. I guess at this point, I can take us up to the 16th of June. We were up near the top of the hill on that evening, I heard this bombing off to the right and I asked some of the infantrymen about it. They said that it was Saint Lô over there. There were a lot of guys that were in the 2nd Engineer Battalion they were being used as the infantry, because they didn't have enough infantrymen. They were griping about not having rifles so they were told to pick them up from the casualties. This first big attack on hill 192 was by three regiments of the divisions 38th, the 23rd and the 9th. It just happened that the 3rd Battalion that I was with was the one that got up to the crest of the Hill . We couldn't go any farther, the opposition was evidently to strong for what ever the reasons were so we were told to retreat. We retreated back to the base of the Hill 192 and there we sat until the 11th of July. That was kind of a static period. They had a real bad storm in the channel I think it was the 19th of June. This storm destroyed a lot of the supplies and held up the whole first army. Hill 192 was surrounded by the 23rd Regiment, the 38th and the 9th. The

23rd Regiment was around the town of Saint George Daily it was a very little town. But there was very heavy fighting there and the town exchanged hands five or six times. There was a good picture of that town in Life magazine July 1944, showing the hedgerows and Hill 192 and some pictures of Saint George Daily. In front of the Hill 192 there wasn't a whole lot of fighting they were just waiting to get more supplies. It was a restful period whenever the infantry wasn't attacking we were pretty safe.

Mark: What did you do during these two or three weeks?

Gill: We made pretty big foxholes and we were shelled by the Germans. **[END SIDE A, TAPE 1]** A lot of times it was in the evenings just before it got dark. I think the reason for that was they could move their guns quickly before they were spotted. But you could hear the shells coming and it wasn't a real heavy shelling. I remember digging foxholes into the hedgerows and there was an awful lot of rain during this period. We would try to put our shelter halves over the foxhole and everybody tried to make the best foxhole that they could. The food got better. The first days of the attack we got K rations, which were like a Cracker Jack box. You got one for breakfast, lunch and supper. There was usually a little can of meat or cheese and crackers other little things it wasn't real good.

Mark: So, how did that change than after you were relatively established?

Gill: While we were in the static period we got C-rations which was a lot better than that canned food. One thing that I did really like, was the egg. I really love powdered eggs that are scrambled and I ate a lot of those. One time we had cherry pie. There were a lot of apple orchards and cherry orchards in Normandy. Some of the cooks made cherry pie and by the time we got back to the collecting station they were ready. It was a pretty peaceful period by comparison. During this static period we didn't do a whole lot, but the infantry spent a whole lot of time in training. They were making plans to attack Hill 192. They had special teams, like an infantry squad that would follow a tank. They had engineers that went along with this little group, then they would blow up the hedgerows so they would move from one hedgerow to the next. The Germans that were on the Hill were on the 3rd Parachute Battalion and they were pretty tough. They had foxholes that were dug way underneath the hedgerows they had interlocking trenches too. By this time they were really in a well-fixed position. They had put as much time as we did to prepare for the attack. In fact they had plans to defend the place. But the attack did succeed and our battalion was in reserve for that, the Second and the First Battalion also took part in it. We were called in as medics later in the afternoon by these Battalions to help with the wounded. There were quite a few wounded during this particular attack.

Mark: I've got some questions about that. I want to go back to the static period. Did you get mail there, were you able to write home and that sort of thing?

Gill: I did get some mail and I was able to write home. We couldn't say too much, our mail was censored. I do have some of the mail at home, my mother saved all my letters. I

couldn't say much and if I did that was crossed out by the censor a lot of it didn't get through. One of the things I do remember getting over there was a fruitcake from my sister. I never liked fruitcake but that is the only thing I do remember getting in the mail outside of regular mail.

Mark: How about military discipline during this time? I'm sure that when you were in fighting, things were lax but during this down time how was it? For example the word I always hear from W.W.II is chicken feces did this sort of thing increase or decrease?

Gill: No, there did not seem to be a whole lot of discipline at all. They weren't tough on us, they let us relax and rest they left us alone pretty much.

Mark: So then back to the successful attack on Hill 192, what sort of casualties were there in your own personal group?

Gill: On that particular attack for some reason I don't remember too much.

Mark: Was their one thing that was more typical, like head wounds or belly wounds or limbs?

Gill: I suppose I could tell you more about that later when I get to some of the other battles as I remember more. I don't know what the total casualties were for that one day. They didn't have as many casualties on that attack as they did have on the 16th of June. That was the first attempt to capture that hill. This attack on the 11th was better planned, they used more tanks than the one on the 16th of June this was a spur of the moment attack. I don't think they had really planned it out to well. They just came up to this hill and I imagine the general's thought it was important. As it turned out it was very important. Until this Hill 192 was captured they actually couldn't break out of Normandy. They had to capture the Hill 192 and then Saint Lô so it was a very important position to take.

Mark: So, what happened after this hill was taken?

Gill: I remember another town Saint Jean that was one of the next attacks. I remember being called out by the infantry to come out as their medic. I remember it was in the morning and we decided not to bother with any foxholes we didn't think we would need them so we didn't dig any. But when the infantry started their attack then we kind of wished we had dug some. I remember looking up and seeing tracers go over the hedgerows. Some of the other things I remember are, walking down this slight hill and seeing another hill going up that had two of our tanks going up it. One tank had been knocked out and the other one of tanks was right behind it. It was on the road with the engine still running, evidently the crew was still in it. There was a lot of real heavy fighting for this town. This was just in the area of Hill 192, I think it was just past that hill. I do remember picking up one casualty he was a 2nd lieutenant he had a very bad head wound. We put him on our litter and we had carried him away and he died. One interesting thing was I got a letter about ten years ago from a guy who was trying to find out about his uncle.

He said his uncle was a Second Lieutenant and he was killed in the area of Saint Jean. He had seen my name in the division newspaper and he wrote a lot of different people to see what he could find out about what had happened to his uncle. So I wrote him and I mentioned a 2nd lieutenant that we had picked up who had died from the head wound. But it turned out that he had found out more information from other people who told him that his uncle had been killed by a mortar and he had been standing up. It wasn't the same guy, but at that particular time when he had first wrote me I thought maybe it was this guy. Most of the casualties that we did pick up never complained about their wounds. I don't know if that was from shock or exactly what. We picked up one officer that really complained of leg wounds not any worse than anybody else, but he did do the most complaining of anybody that I ever saw.

Mark: So much that he did stick out in your mind? Could you tell me anything about the casualties, as to their rank? For example the 2nd lieutenant were notorious for being bumped off that sort of thing?

Gill: The officers never wore their insignias on their clothes or their helmets. Because they had the idea that the Germans would shoot them. Although I think it was actually too hard to see anything that small. The Germans were not up real close, in fact I hardly ever saw them. Because of the hedgerows and the trees you just couldn't see very far. Some times the fighting was close from one hedgerow to the another some times it was a block or two away. We came across two German soldiers one time that had been wounded, this was really unusual we hardly ever saw any German wounded. They generally took their wounded back with them when they retreated. This probably could have been in the area of Saint Jean, but I remember picking up this German soldier and starting back with him and we were shelled, we had to drop the litter and hit the ground several times before we got back to the aide station with him. When we got back to the aide station there was some German medic's that were helping out at the aide station with the casualties. Saint Jean was a pretty big battle. It seemed like any of the towns that they fought over were tough fights, there was house to house fighting and there were strong holds the road hubs were important. Many times the Germans would defend them more than they would others.

Mark: What was the GI's view or image of the Germans?

[END SIDE B, TAPE 1]

Gill: Evil. They knew they were tough, because the Germans never pulled back very fast. We were there two months and we had gone some thing like 33 miles. That is an indication of just how tough the Germans were. But I never thought of them as evil and I never heard of a lot of hatred towards them. This one fellow that I knew said that some of the German prisoners were shot instead of taking them to Omaha Beach. They got a letter from Eisenhower department telling them not to shoot any more prisoners. I think this was a rare occasion, I never felt any animosity towards them. When I picked

them up they were wounded and I treated them as well as I would have treated any American.

Mark: Did you have any contact with French people or were they pretty much evacuated by then?

Gill: Very little, but I remember seeing them, There were a lot of French women in Normandy but very few men. I had heard that so many of the men had been killed in W.W.I that there just weren't a lot of men around at that particular time. Some of them wore wooden shoes like they do in Holland, they didn't have any others because the war had been going on for some time. We didn't have any contact with the French simply because they would get out of the way when there was fighting they would just move. I remember one night drinking apple cider and Calvados, which is pretty strong stuff. Some of the guys even got pretty drunk on it. A chaplain named father Rousseau that was with us, always had services usually before any attack. One day his pew got hit by a shell and his vestments were all shot up with fragments. One night we heard a German machine gun firing and he said "Gee I hate to see that firing that means some of our people are going to get killed or wounded. I had gotten to know him fairly well, I guess that's what I remember of him.

Mark: Is it true? that there are no atheist, in foxholes?

Gill: I would say that's true, I'm Catholic myself. We had confession and communion and masses. The guys would all go to confession before the battle, they were all pretty religious.

Mark: Do you think this was just amongst the Catholics or the Protestants?

Gill: I didn't pay that close attention, but I think who ever had a service whether it was a Methodist or a Protestant minister or a Catholic priest I think people went. I don't think there were too many who were atheist who didn't believe in God when they were putting their life on the line. I remember over hearing one infantryman talking, and he said "I would give everything I got, about a thousand to two thousand dollars in the bank, everything I own if I didn't have to be here".

Mark: So, after Saint Jean, how fast did you move? That was near the end of July and here you are at August the fourth, you must started to move fairly quickly after that?

Gill: One of the things I could tell about is after Hill 192 fell. The next big thing was the capture of Saint Lô by the 29th Division. The 2nd Division didn't take part in that in a since because they didn't actually attack the town. That was around the 18th of July and then on the 25th of July there was this big bombing raid. This probably was the only time that the infantry told us what was actually going on. They said they were going to shoot one tank after another if it got knocked out they would send another and another. This turned out to be Patton's 3rd Army, which was mostly armored divisions. It was

shooting through this gap that was made by the bombing raid. The first bombing raid was on the 25th. They stopped it early because of bad weather or something. They ended up bombing some of their own troops. What happened was they put down markers of gas yellow and as the succeeding waves of airplanes came it blew the markers over and they dropped bombs on their own troops. One American General McGarr, was killed along with four or five hundred troops were killed by this bombing. I was off to the left of that and I could see the planes all day long on the 25th. You could hear the bombing, it was like a buffalo stampede reputation boom, boom constantly all daylong. They called off the bombing raid on the 26th after they had bombed their own troops on the 25th. I don't remember the details, but there was a difference of opinions with the airforce and the infantry as to where the bombers should come from. Some thought they should parallel the front lines some thought they should bisect the front line. But there wasn't a general agreement on just how they should attack this front. This bombing raid did on the 26th did take place. It was shortly after this maybe the 1st day when they started to break out. At first the Germans were really stunned and our troops were stunned too a little bit. They found out that the Germans were more stunned than we were. Patton's Armor Divisions were pretty fresh they hadn't really been in the fighting at all. Once they broke through the hedgerows it was pretty much open country. Now they were able to use the tanks a lot better, then before and they made a lot of progress. They then moved into Brittany, in and around the city of Brest then they headed towards Paris. It was probably in this area that the Germans started to pull back. After this first major pull back in several weeks, they really pulled back. I remember we had some night marches because of that. I remember one night march on the 3rd of August. We were walking along the rows the moon was out and it was a real bright night so you could really see. There were all kinds of German equipment that had been shot up by the airforce and it was pushed off to the side of the road. We came to a field after walking several miles where we stopped for the rest of the night. On August 4th I seem to remember more about that one particular day than any of the other days, many things happened on that particular day. We woke up in the morning and were assigned to follow the infantry again. The 3rd Battalion was attacking toward Vitré and they were walking through the hedgerows in kind of files. It was the one of the first times I could really see the infantry getting ready to attack a town. I could look to my right and to my left and they were walking along the hedgerows and they had radios and you could hear the guys talking to somebody in the back or to the left or right of them anyway. There was no firing it was very quite because the Germans had pulled back. I remember hearing a little bit of firing by a German gun and then some firing by the American infantry. They brought back this German sniper who had wounded himself but that was pretty much the extent of the firing. Up until later in the afternoon we came to a hedgerow where the infantry had stopped. Evidently they had run into some opposition from the Germans so I lay down in this hedgerow. Some of the things I remember well from that time is that this infantry men was walking along he had his rifle pointed down and he accidentally fired it between the legs of another infantry men who was on the ground. When I lay down I fell asleep because we had this night march and we all were pretty tired and exhausted. I guess one of the reasons that you can take combat, is that you become so tired that you

don't really care as much to what happens to you. Its like football players when they play a game after the first few goals and add on the tacklers their in more condition for the game. Why I think that's true for combat, if you are exhausted you can take it better than if you are really fresh. I was awakened by this friend of mine, Bontatello, he was given the Bronze Star which I just found out this year for these activities that took place. He said that on the other side of the hedgerow there was a hill that went down to a little valley and there was a little river there. This infantry officer said that some of their scouts or point men were down there and had been wounded and asked us to go down and check them out. That meant we would be between our lines and the Germans line. We were behind the hedgerow and this little valley went down on the other side of the ridge. Maybe a block or two away was where the Germans were but it was quite there wasn't any firing. Another thing I remember at this particular time was an infantryman that came back without his rifle. This officer sent him back to get it, he was really mad at him. So the guy climbed over the hedgerow and I never saw him again. But some of the infantrymen said that they thought that one of the guys had been wounded one of the scouts that they had sent out. They had asked for us to go and check him out. As we went down the hill we came across him we didn't find any wounds on him on this particular guy at all. We looked around to see what happened to him but he was dead. the infantry that he was dead. Then we continued farther down the hill it was kind of a long hill, when we got down near the little stream we came across one infantry man who had been shot in the back. He had welt wounds you could see where the bullets had grazed his skin a little bit, they didn't appear real serious. Then one guy who had sprained his ankle and couldn't walk. We were a one-litter squad so we could only take one casualty at a time. We put one casualty on the litter and started back up the hill. I can't remember which one it was but we were carrying one of them. When we started up the hill our infantry started their attack. They started firing at the top of the hill and across so we couldn't continue any farther. We came to a little shack and we went inside and we stayed there until it was quite. I never heard so much noise in my life, because by this time the Germans were firing back and our infantry were firing. We just stayed in this little shack until we didn't hear too much noise, and it got quite. We figured our infantry had come down the hill and had past us so we came out and that was the case they had gone by us. They were headed up towards the another ridge and evidently the Germans had pulled back I'm not sure. We had used our artillery and they had really shelled that area. I didn't hear much from the Germans. We picked up the guys and carried them to where our aide station was. This was in the afternoon and I remember seeing a bunch of new infantrymen that were just scared to death. You could tell they were new because all there clothes were clean fresh and they were really frightened. They had evidently been thrown in this battle for the first time and they were scared stiff. We evacuated the casualties in this little battle. After we got the last ones back they told us to report to K Company which was on the other side of Vitré. Evidently K Company had the 3rd Battalion had gone through Vitré without a whole lot of fighting. I had read that the Germans had pulled back without house to house fighting. It was about 7:00 that night and we were going to stay with them for the night. A lot of times in the evening we would go back to the Battalion aide station. But this night we stayed with them for the night. Then the Germans started to shell the town of

Vitré with 88's. So we got called back into the town and I think there were at least two litter squads by then. There were wounded all over the place. It was really a heavy shelling and the shells were hitting the buildings and the rock debris and everything was flying all over. It was causing a lot of casualties because when ever the infantry moves forward there is a lot of Signal Corps guys coming up with their stuff. There are other guys bringing up ammunition and other guys bringing up all sorts of supplies. There is a lot of movement and that was the case in the town. The infantry that had been attacked were on the other side of the town where it was safer. But the other guys were coming through the town and were getting wounded. I remember this guys running up to us, and he had lost almost all of his jaw. You could just see the tattered parts of his cheek. It had evidently just happened other wise I think he would have bled to death. We took a bandage and just put it on his face. We set up a collecting point in the town on a high way coming into Vitré. We kind of gathered up the casualties to this collecting point. If the guy that was wounded, could walk we sent him over to this area if not we put him on the litter and carried him over. We put them on a jeep and sent them back to the aide station and then the jeep would come back and we would load it up again this was just continuous process. The jeep could hold three or four casualties they were held up straight on top of the jeep. I remember standing between them to keep them from falling off. I remember one guy had his foot blown off and we put a tourniquet on it to keep him from bleeding to death. There were a lot of really severe wounds from this shelling. I remember getting back after going to the aide station, I think I made two trips in this particular jeep. If the guys weren't to bad and it looked like they could stay on by themselves without falling off we sent them back on the jeep with out one of us. I got back and I remember the area to the left was kind of a high not a real high hill but maybe fifty or sixty feet high with houses and then a bank in back of it. I remember being on the road and we heard some shells coming in really close. So we threw ourselves on the ground and the next thing I heard was a big explosion. I came to and I felt blood running down from my fanny. I had a flesh wound on my fanny and I was also having trouble breathing. I thought it was from the blast of the shell that I couldn't breath real well. But I had gotten a piece of shrapnel in my left lung. I found that out later after they took my jacket off back at the station hospital. But up to that point I didn't know that I had been wounded in the back at all. In spite of getting a piece of shrapnel that was about an inch and a half long, I just thought I couldn't breath because of that explosion. The shell evidently hit pretty close, if we would have been standing up, we would have been killed. There was about four of us maybe five I think all together that had been hit by this shell that had exploded. The other guys had minor wounds they weren't as bad as the one I had. This friend of mine, Bontatell that I had visited in Texas he didn't get hit at all. He got into a culvert or something when he heard the shell coming. So he came out with a few other medics that didn't get hit. They put us on the jeep and sent us back to the aide station. I guess I had mentioned before that when I got back to the aide station before I got wounded, that it was just full there were wounded just all over the place. You couldn't even find a space to set down a litter. There was an ambulance that was coming from the collecting station picking them up and going back to the collecting station as fast as they could take away the wounded. I remember getting back to the collecting station and meeting the officer who

was my company commander. Some of the guys that had combat exhaustion were also in the collecting station where it was safer to work on those guys. I saw some of those guys and said hello to them. But I remember getting back to the station hospital when they took off my jacket they said "Hey you got a wound in your back here." So they operated on me that night I'm not sure what time that was but it was pretty late by then. I do remember waking up in the morning. I remember that there was a big tent like they use in Mash. It was rolled up partially and the sun was coming up and I was on the ground and I could feel the warmth of the sun. I was still alive! It was the one thing that I felt the best about was the fact that I was still alive. I really felt sorry for Bontatello because he was still there and had to go on and stay there. I saw him about three weeks ago for the first time in 51 years. I asked him what happened after I got wounded. He said that the infantry had to pull back and out of the town. He said the next day the company aide put him charge of our litter squad he became a Corporal. So he finished out the war as a company aide man. He went through many battles said he was standing next to a friend of his and he was asking the fellow what the password was. So this said well just a minute I will go see what it is. He took about two steps and stepped on a mine. It blew off both his legs and killed him. Teal got wounded in the face and a concussion and stuff from that. But all this I found out after 51 years. Up until a few weeks ago I didn't know whether he had survived the war or not. We have a division association and in the little directory I never have seen his name in it. So I had no way to contact him, no address for him no idea how to locate him. It was quite interesting to find him, he is the only one I have come in contact with from the war. When we were down there we came across another guy that lived about sixty miles away that we knew. This guy hadn't stayed in too long he suffered from combat exhaustion early in the campaign. He was back at the clearing station, where it was safer.

Mark: I'm interested in your medical processing after you got wounded. What sort of steps did you take?

Gill: After I was operated on in the evening of 4th of August or the early morning of the 5th, I stayed there four or five days, I can't remember exactly. Then I was put on a C-47 and flown from Normandy to England. There were about twelve litters on the plane if I remember right. I was sent to a hospital in this little town called Saint Albans, which was quite close to London. One of the things that I remember there is, very often we would get these buzz bombs over the hospital. They were buzz bombs that had been sent for London. They had over shot London and had come down in the area of our hospital. It was like a little airplane, you could hear the motors of them. As long as you could hear the motor it was fine but when the motor stopped they would come down. We didn't have any that landed on top of us. But we did have one that the concussion pushed in the walls of closet hut. You could see the walls actually had come in two or three inches from the blast of it. During this time in the hospital to I remember we got one of the rockets just before I was sent back to the states. One of the rockets, came over you could tell them because there was no warning of them coming. You would just hear a big bang! I remember getting that quite a few of the buzz bombs. But they

didn't bother anybody because they were pretty tame, compared to being shelled at the front. It really was a minor thing. I have a little clipping from one of the English newspapers this one guy had sent a letter to the editors saying "Would the airforce please stop shooting the buzz bombs over the hospital".

Mark: So, your wounds merited your discharge from the service?

Gill: Yeah. I was sent back on a hospital ship, which left in about October. The name of the hospital ship name was the Charles A. Stanford. It had been a cruise ship called the Sea Bonnie [hard to tell the name], I don't know if you are familiar with that song Sea Bonnie? I'm not a very good singer but, there is a relatively famous song called the Sea Bonnie and the Sea Bonnie Indians. We landed at Charleston and I was transferred from Charleston to Kennedy General Hospital in Memphis. I remember from my hospital stay that I got to know this one fellow quite well his name was William Meadbetts. He had been an infantryman and he was in the bed next to me. He had been wounded near his liver and his face was kind of yellowish. But he was up and out of bed and I thought he was doing pretty well. I sent him a Christmas card and I got it back saying that he had died. After I got back I wrote his family and told them about it. They were interested in hearing it, I really regret not going out there to talk to them, but I did carry on quite a bit of conversation. Another thing I remember from being in the hospital there is they had this big raid on the 16th and 17th of September when I was in the hospital. In which they dropped paratroopers at Arnhen, it was this operation Market Garden in which they were trying to take a short cut to Germany. This movie A Bridge To Far, made it rather famous I don't know if you saw this?

Mark: No, I haven't seen it but I know of it.

Gill: I remember looking out of the hospital window at the gliders and the C-47 that were going over for two straight days. I think there were at least two American Paratrooper Divisions and at least one or two British Paratrooper Divisions. One of the painful things I remember is from the wound in the chest I developed pleurisy. **[SIDE A, TAPE 2 BEGINS]** They had to put a needle a long needle about four inches long to drain out my lungs to drain off the fluid, that hurt like a son of a gun. The wound on my fanny was oh six or eight inches long and it took a long time for the two sides to get close enough to put stitches in it. But it never really bothered me, this leg is a slight bit shorter and my wife says I walk funny.

Mark: So, when did you get back to Madison?

Gill: Then I got back to Kennedy General Hospital and I was there for a while. It was in February I was sent from Kennedy General to Pursy General Hospital in Michigan. That's where I got my discharge.

Mark: February 1945?

Gill: It was February of 1945 when I got back.

Mark: What were your priorities in getting your life back on track?

Gill: Well I was still pretty young I was 19 years old when I got my discharge. I had been in the army about a year and seven months. I had gone in when I had just turned 18 so I was still young. There weren't many of the guys around that were in my class, because they were all in the service. I was one of the first guys to get out and I got a medical discharge. So I kind of bummed around with some of the guys in high school, in the 1944 class that lived in my neighborhood. Art Johnson, he was head of the Parks Department he had just retired and some of those guys because I had known them before.

Mark: When did you start school?

Gill: Then my dad had a small clothing store on state street and I went to work for him. Then we had the GI Bill rights and I hadn't thought too much about going to school. But then I thought, "Gee! it's all free." and they give you eighty dollars a month and they pay for your books and so on. So I decided to go to school and I started in September of 1945 after I got out.

Mark: So, you were one of the first veterans', back on the campus?

Gill: Yes. So, I was probably one of the--well they were starting to arrive and in fact I remember that the classes were really crowded. You would come into some of the lecture halls and if you didn't get there early you didn't get a seat. There were people standing up all around the walls because they didn't put any restrictions on the number of students that they would take. They were pretty lax, compared to now days they took everybody who wanted to go. I got a degree in Economics. Then we got a semester of credit for being in the service so I actually had to go about three and a half years. I wasn't a real good student my dad was short of help in his clothing store. I worked about forty hours a week there when I was going to school.

Mark: So, what was life like on campus at the time, a lot of vets?

Gill: Yeah. There were a lot of vets and a lot of my friends were back by then. William Burn who became one of the judges was a close friend of mine and still is. He was going to school with me and there were other fellows that had been veterans who were going to school. They said that they were, more serious than the normal students were.

Mark: I have had vets tell me that too.

Gill: I guess I didn't pay that much attention I suppose they were because of the fact that they were older and had all these experiences of the war. I guess one of the things that I

noticed when I got back and out of the service was that I just couldn't get excited any more. People would get excited over things that didn't excite me at all.

Mark: Did you know the term "nervous out of the service" have you heard that before?

Gill: No, I guess not.

Mark: Some vets will talk about that and some of the anxiety about getting back into society, being excepted by their families and friends.

Gill: No, I didn't have any of that. I wasn't nervous about getting out of the service or joining friends or family or anything like that. It was just the normal thing to do, to get out of the service and go home. But things seemed pretty tame to me after all this excitement that I had gone through. It was almost like I missed it.

Mark: You mean the military life?

Gill: All the excitement the invasion the boat trips the whole bit it was quite a bit of stuff in a year and a half. You know for a relatively young kid.

Mark: Did the GI Bill cover all of your school expenses?

Gill: Yeah it did, along with the pension that they gave me. I got this letter one day from the government saying that I had been awarded a 80% disability pension I hadn't even asked for it. I wondered how I got that, then I got a letter from the VFW saying that they had taken my case. Evidently they had gotten it from my medical discharge. I didn't turn it down.

Mark: This brings up a couple of things I wanted to touch on. A. Were your dealings, with the Veterans Administration and any sort of medical problems that you may have had after the service. I don't get the impression that you had a terrible much difficulty physical because of your wounds.

Gill: I have always had a little bit of shortness of breath because of this wound. I have trouble moving this leg in certain positions because of muscles had gotten cut on it. I have a hard time tying a shoe, or ice skates or some thing like that. But I could walk and swim and everything. I didn't know about the piece of shrapnel in my heart until 1992. If I probably would have knew about that back when I was 19 it probably would have scared me to death.

Mark: But your wounds didn't get in the way of your making a living?

Gill: No. I worked for my dad at the clothing store and then he retired and I ran it for about ten or twelve years. All the shopping and a lot of the shoppers moved off of State Street out to the Malls and that. In 1967 I had friends of mine that were schoolteachers, and

they came in. They were off all summer and Christmas and here I was working six days a week and two nights. I thought boy this looks pretty good this teaching. I had already gotten a degree in Economics when I went back to school for a year and got a teachers certificate. I became a teacher in 1969 when I was 44.

Mark: At what level, high school?

Gill: At elementary. I taught at Saint Marie Gaieties for one year and then I got a chance to teach at Saint Ray Fields, which was right near where I lived. So I went there and then they closed after what a year for lack of students. Then I went to work for the public school system. I worked for them for about seventeen years. I taught at Leopold here in town. I had the job at the clothing store, then the teaching and I retired in 1987.

Mark: After the war did you have a problem finding a place to live? You grew up in town?

Gill: I was late in getting married and I lived at home right after the war. I didn't get married until I was 44. My wife and I looked for a house in 1969 after we got married. I loved the water and we got a chance to get an apartment over here on Speed Street. It's a real big old house and it had three apartments in it. We rented it for two years and then I had a chance to buy it so we ended up buying. After we had two kids we took over the top floor and the center floor and we still have the apartment that we rent out.

Mark: Did you use any sort of veteran's benefits to buy that place?

Gill: No, I borrowed the money from my mother. At that time it was \$36,000 when we bought the house. My mother said "Gee, you're paying a lot for that house." But it was three apartments and on the lake.

Mark: My little hole in the wall condominium cost a lot more than that. I just got one last area that I want to cover. That involves veteran's organizations and reunions and those sorts of things. You mentioned the VFW took up your case. For example did you say hey maybe I should join the VFW, did you join the VFW?

Gill: Yeah, I have joined the VFW I have been a member since 1945.

Mark: What prompted you to join that particular group?

Gill: I thought they had done this for me and I thought I ought to really join so I joined them. I belong to this Second Division Association in fact I went out to meeting in Spokane last summer. Also after the meeting we took a boat trip up to Alaska.

Mark: That sounds like fun. When did you get involved with the Second Division group was that later on?

Gill: That came later on. I went to one meeting in Chicago and I didn't know anybody there. Actually when I have gone to the meetings I haven't come across anybody that I was in the service with. There is this fellow in Mineral Point that was in the 38th that I met since the war who was there during the war Bob Dent who lives in Monona. There is a good friend of mine Ray Knutson, I was talking to him at a funeral and he said his brother was in the Second Division. His brother was killed at Hill 192. Then there is this other fellow Paul Skidmore who's father was in the Second Division and he found out about me and he was interested in it. He has been very active in the division and he has gone to the meetings. His father had several awards, a Silver Star and the Bronze Star. His dad had been very badly wounded but he said his father never received any compensation. He died in his forties from his wounds. He said that his dad said "That as long as he could drive a truck he didn't need any compensation." This friend of mine Bontatello and this Mexican guy are trying to get compensation for their wounds. I'm going to try and help them but I don't know if I can or not. He said he suffers headaches and dizziness and he never has collected any compensation. In spite that he has scars on his forehead and on the side of his face from this explosion. So I will try and help them.

Mark: We will see what you can do. I'm interested in the VFW experience. You joined in 1945 were you what you would call an active member, did you go to the meetings or did you just go and drink beer at the hall or something?

Gill: No, I wasn't very active at all. I guess I didn't take a real interest in it, but I always kept up my membership.

Mark: Are you still a member?

Gill: Yeah, I'm still a member. What these other guys that I was with Paul Skidmore and Bob Dent we get together about once every two months and have lunch and talk about the war. Things come up some times that I didn't know about. I have learned so much more about what went on in Normandy from these books about the battles and stuff. One of the footnotes at the beginning of the book that they mention, that the books were written for the guys that had been wounded and never knew what was going on.

Mark: I never heard that before?

Gill: I guess when you are in combat you only see the small things. A lot of the times we wouldn't know where the front was and we would keep walking. Until we had this one guy, whose name was Cullen, and he just disappeared, he was 50 to 70 yards a head of us. We had been walking and we got told to come back and we never saw him again. This Thompson that I saw about three weeks ago said he was pretty sure he was either killed or captured by the Germans. A lot of times we wouldn't know we were at the front until we got shot at by a sniper. One day we were out and the infantry told us to pick up a casualty and there were two litter squads. Bontatello wasn't with me that time and we flipped a coin to see who would go to get the casualty and who would go to get

the jeep. Those guys lost so they went to get a casualty and we left to get the jeep. We were fired on by machine guns but nobody got hit. But then when we came back with the jeep Bontatello said that Earnest MacCawine had been killed and two of the other guys were badly wounded. Earnest MacCawine said "Gill if we don't get out of here we are going to get killed" and he did. Another guy that had gotten killed the third day a shore was Sidney Harrison. I had given him a pair of my socks, I had some dry socks and he died with my socks on. I remember him climbing over a hedgerow and was up high and he got wounded in the back of his neck. I can still remember him lying on the ground and his face was white. Evidently he had lost so much blood he just turned white. He was the first one to be killed of the bunch.

Mark: Did medics suffer a lot of casualties in your experience?

Gill: Of the forty guys that we landed with I got wounded five of them had been killed and I think there was about twelve that had suffered physical wounds and the other guys had combat exhaustion. There were eight of the original medics left and that were still functioning as medics. We had gotten replacements but of the original forty there were eight left of the original that I knew of. I had written it down so it is pretty accurate account. We had one guy that had gotten moved because of appendicitis and one guy was going blind so he was taken out. I forget what was wrong with the third guy but he was taken out too. It was a matter that you knew you were going to get wounded or killed sooner or later.

Mark: Eventually.

Gill: So, many you know one time I remember being in a sunken road and a shell hit and never went off, it would have killed us if it would have gone off. Another time some infantry were in front of us and one of these bombs Bouncing Betty's mines came up and blew most of the face off of one of them and wounded some of the others. Shells came so close that the infantry loses so many we were losing so many you reach a point that I used to pray that I would be spared. I would say, "God if you want my life you can have it" you reach that point. You reach a point of exhaustion.

Mark: You have exhausted my questions is there anything you would like to add?

Gill: I guess that's basically it.

Mark: I thank you very much, for stopping in, I really appreciate it.

Gill: Yeah, you're welcome.