

# William (Bill) Frickel - Private to Staff Sergeant

Served with distinction in the Hq1 81mm Mortar Platoon from October 20, 1942 to October 1945. Bill functioned as chief of the wire section, one of the most critical and hazardous jobs in the platoon.



Bill Frickel is a distinguished member of the "Greatest of the Greatest Generation."

Bill Frickel established and maintained the integrity of the ground communication lines (wires) connecting the Mortar Platoon Forward Observers and the Mortar Platoon Fire Direction Center. He performed this function with diligence and efficiency, at no time was the network disrupted for an inordinate period.

Bill's outstanding efforts contributed immeasurably to the continuity of the mortar and artillery fire support provided the first battalion and adjacent front line units.

Bill Frickel was the quietest man in Hq1. His assured response to any question, activity, or event was simply "Yep." Bill's contribution to this album was equally modest, leaving any revelation concerning his combat experience and heroic actions to someone else. Accordingly, Bill's WW II comrades willingly provided information for this summary.

Bill Frickel says.

"In September 1942, the United States Government called me. On October 1, I was on my way to a reception center in Salt Lake City, Utah.

At the reception center, during one of many formations we were told to stay behind when the formation was dismissed, if we were interested in joining the parachute troops. I thought I was interested and stayed to hear more.

The Sergeant told us about the paratroopers. He said paratroopers got the best food, they did not walk much, and that they were paid \$50.00 for each jump. This sounded good to me and I volunteered.

Three days later, I was on a train going to Camp Blanding, Florida. We got off the train somewhere in Florida, lined up, and got on trucks that took us to Camp Blanding.

After weeks of basic infantry training, and parachute school physical training - with countless long runs (often twice a day), lots of marching, no passes, and fair food, we moved to Fort Benning, Georgia, and the parachute school.

Once again we were running, doing exhausting physical training exercises, and mastering intricate landing apparatus and training devices.

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We spent our evening hours learning to 'pack' parachutes. We were told we would use the parachutes we packed during our qualification jumps, and we did.

Finally, I learned that parachute pay would be \$50.00 per month. [So much for the \$50.00 per jump.] However, the food was good, but we walked or ran everywhere, WW II airborne units did not have vehicles.

On February 26, 1943, we in Hq1 completed our five qualification parachute jumps. We pinned on our parachute wings, bloused our trousers in highly shined brown parachutist's boots, and had a blue and white parachute patch sewn on our caps. You could not miss us; we were proud, cocky parachutists. Finally, we were given ten day furloughs, our first days off since October 1942.

We returned to Fort Benning, from our furloughs, packed up and moved to Camp Mackall, NC. The camp consisted of new wooden buildings erected in a swampy wilderness with muddy ruts for roads. We quickly learned to clear brush and pickup debris.

In the following months, we developed our combat skills. Our days were spent doing advanced infantry training, crew-served weapons drills and firing, and individual weapons qualification. We made night jumps and maneuvered in South Carolina and Tennessee.

Our training continued into December and I began to think about spending Christmas at Camp Mackall or perhaps at home on furlough. Instead, we were ordered to pack everything we owned for a move. No one knew where we were going! However, on December 19, 1943, we marched to the railroad station. We had the feeling that we were destined for a long overseas voyage.

We arrived at Camp Shanks, New York December 20, and spent Christmas Day in camp. No passes but good food.

We loaded aboard the "James Parker" on December 27. In the morning, we joined a convoy of ships and sailed into the Atlantic Ocean.

Eleven days later, we landed in Ireland, and began orientations and training. On March 10, 1944, we started a journey by boat and train to Nottingham, England.

In Nottingham, we moved into tents in one of the King's Deer Parks, and applied our cleanup skills.

We started an accelerated combat oriented training program, including night jumps, and arduous field exercises.

Early in June 1944, we moved to an airport, received briefings, bid farewell to our friends, and heavily loaded with ammunition and rations we were boosted into our C-47 planes.

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We jumped into Normandy on D-Day June 6, 1944. We returned to England by LST and to Nottingham where we received a 'heroes' welcome.

We received replacements for our men killed or wounded in Normandy, and participated in memorial services for our lost friends.

Following a few months of intensive training, we again moved to an airport, and on September 17, 1944 parachuted into a farmers fields near Nijmegen, Holland."

Bill's comrades say.

"In Holland, Bill's skill as a battlefield chef surfaced. Most days, even under enemy fire, Bill would have a live chicken tied by a string to a peg by his foxhole. Sometime in the morning, with a gasoline stove and a tin pan, Bill would make soup out of the chicken, combined with whatever vegetables he could find in the battlefield area or get from local farmers.

Retrieving the "used" chicken from the soup, Bill would roll it in flour (or something) and fricassee it in his tin pan. When eaten with "K" crackers (hard tack) that chicken soup and fricassee chicken provided a delicious much appreciated meal - but only for a few of Bill's cronies in the platoon command group." [So much for camaraderie!]

Bill Frickel continues.

"On November 11, following a twenty-two mile march, we met trucks that carried us to Sissonne, France. In Sissonne, life was good - we occupied a French Artillery Post. We were living under a roof, the first since we left Camp Shanks, NY. We had comfortable rooms, warm dry beds, lots of good hot food, and no incoming artillery shells. However, our good life ended abruptly -- the desperate Germans had launched a surprise attack to split the allied forces, and seize the channel ports at Antwerp.

Our regiment was loaded into open trucks, and rode in the bitter cold to Werbomont, Belgium. We were expected to help stop the German penetration in what later was called the 'Battle of the Bulge.'

The 'Bulge' was in the allied lines. It encompassed hundreds of miles, and reflected a determined German total commitment. Needless to say the allied forces situation was exceedingly perilous.

We fought the Germans during a bitter cold European winter of sunless days, and heavy snows. We did help stop and destroy the German incursion, at a great cost in lives and suffering.

In January 1945, we participated in a furious counterattack. We fought through the densely forested Ardennes and the heavily fortified Siegfried Line to the Roer

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River. By February 1945, the 'Bulge' was history, and we moved back to Sissonne into theatre reserve.

In Sissonne, we moved into tents - our comfortable caserne had been occupied by a hospital. We received extra rations to compensate for all of the meals we missed fighting in Belgium.

We absorbed replacements for our extensive losses in the Ardennes, held memorial services for our lost comrades, and started a vigorous training program that included a practice parachute jump.

In April 1945, we moved to an airfield outside of Paris prepared to parachute into Germany to rescue allied prisoners of war. However, the mission was canceled when the allied forces overran the camps and liberated the prisoners. In May 1945 the Germans surrendered, the war in Europe was over.

We returned to Sissonne, packed our belongings, and moved by train to Frankfurt, Germany. We moved into Hedderheim a suburb of Frankfurt and served in the occupation forces as the elite honor guard and security force for General Eisenhower's headquarters.

In the fall of 1945, I returned to the United States and was discharged from the Army."

Bill Frickel was an outstanding courageous soldier, a competent leader, and a cherished friend. He earned:

- ?? Bronze Star Medal w/oak leaf cluster
- ?? Purple Heart
- ?? Combat Infantry Badge
- ?? Parachute Qualification Badge with two stars for combat jumps (Normandy & Holland)
- ?? European Theatre of Operations (ETO) Medal with Invasion Arrowhead and four battle stars.
- ?? Presidential Unit Citation
- ?? French and Belgium Fourrageres
- ?? Orange Lanyard of the Royal Netherlands Army
- ?? Numerous defense medals including the Occupation Medal with a Germany Bar

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Bill Frickel concludes:

"Back in Montana, I returned to the job I left with the railroad in 1942. I married my sweetheart Violet on August 23, 1947 and we were blessed with five children.

I retired in 1981 and spend my time woodworking - especially making toys, and I do a little fishing. **Yep!** It's a good life!"



**Bill and Violet Frickel**

Bill and Violet Frickel reside at 802 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue S, Laurel, Montana, 59044-8500

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This Album is Not For Sale

**T**his excerpt from the "We Served Proudly, The Men of Hq1" album contains the recollections of men who in their youth risked their lives in furtherance of our national interests. These memoirs are sacred to them -- especially those events alluding to activities in which comrades lost their lives on the battlefields of Europe.

This album was prepared for perpetual residence in the archives of the Camp Blanding Museum complex, operated by the Camp Blanding Museum and Historical Associates, Inc. Starke, Florida. We are grateful for the support and assistance of the Camp Blanding Museum and Historical Associates, and for their kindness in having the museum make our album available to historians, students, researchers and others interested in our background and brief history.

No reproduction or distribution restrictions are imposed or implied for the album or pages thereof – providing such actions are not undertaken for profit.

Copies of the album have been presented to the Hq1 veterans or their survivors that contributed information for the effort. To facilitate reproducing copies of individual memoirs for relatives or friends, the memoirs have been developed as separate entities.

October 19, 2004

~~George S. Sade~~

Hq1 Album Collator