

# William Gilliam

## 2nd Armored Division

*From the web site of It Took  
A War - A collection of World  
War II Letters*

**From an interview of World War II Veterans  
conducted by James Triesler for the Handley Library  
Archives and the Winchester-Frederick County  
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by JAMES TRIESLER



**William Gilliam:** I live up in Brumley, Missouri. I've tried to locate the rest of my [tank] crew all these years, and I didn't know what had happened to them. When I punched the name in [the computer for] Lieutenant Moore...he got killed the next day and there was another boy from Missouri, who pulled me out of it (their tank), and he got killed ten days later, so that only left

one. He wasn't in the system so I don't know if he made it back or not.

**James Triesler:** When you say pulled me out of it, what happened?

**William Gilliam:** I was wounded, you know. I guess a bazooka hit us. There was one shooting at us and it blew the turret doors off, and killed another boy that was standing right by me.

**James Triesler:** Where were you when that happened?

**William Gilliam:** In Belgium. We just started the drive to cut the Bulge in two again and we were gonna meet some of Patton's boys coming up from the South. It only lasted about an hour. So, I left them.

**James Triesler:** Who was your commanding officer?

**William Gilliam:** General Harmon

**James Triesler:** Did you have to be evacuated to a hospital?

**William Gilliam:** Yeah, yeah I came back to the States. I still have over 2 dozen pieces in my neck and shoulder and I have several, down here, in my leg.

**James Triesler:** Did they give you a medal for that?

**William Gilliam:** Purple Heart, yep. I came back to England, so, let's see, it was about two months that I was in the hospital over there. Then I came back to the States, stayed in the hospital, 'til, well I was in hospitals 9 months altogether, and finally they discharged me.

**James Triesler:** How long were you in Europe before you were wounded?

**William Gilliam:** Well, I got over there about the first of April, into England.

Then, I didn't go in on D-Day. **Second Armor** was in action in North Africa and Sicily, so they didn't throw them in on D-Day, but they went in shortly after.

**James Triesler:** We always wonder about censorship with letters, did you have any experience with the censor or having your letters censored?

**William Gilliam:** My lieutenant, my tank commander, he censored my mail.

**James Triesler:** Was he pretty good about it?

**William Gilliam:** Yeah, he was, he was nice. He was a great guy. I hated for that to happen to him.

**James Triesler:** Do you remember the date you were wounded?

**William Gilliam:** 3rd of January, '45.

**James Triesler:** What did you think about the enemy?

**William Gilliam:** Well, some of it was pretty rough. In Malmady, that German officer, he just mowed a bunch of them guys down. They were just rear echelon guys, we called them, and they herded them out in that field and just mowed them all down.

**James Triesler:** What was it like for you inside a tank?

**William Gilliam:** Well it was pretty close quarters in there, you had ammunition wrapped all around you, and underneath you, and that's why most of them burned when they got hit; course ours didn't. That bazooka hit us on top, instead, but they said it burned later, I guess it got hit again, and then probably after that they repaired it and put it back in action.

**James Triesler:** What did you end up doing as a career after the war?

**William Gilliam:** I was a maintenance man for the state highway department. I spent 32 years at that.

**James Triesler:** Have you been back over to Europe at all?

**William Gilliam:** Yeah. [My daughter] and her husband were stationed in Ramstein, Germany. We went back several years ago and then the country of Holland invited, I believe it was, 75 disabled veterans from the six divisions that liberated their country. They picked us up in New York, took

us over, kept us two weeks and brought us back [to the United States].

**JT:** How did they treat you over there?

**WG:** They loved the Americans, Holland does.

**JT:** Were you married during the war?

**WG:** No

**JT:** Did you know your wife before you went over to Europe?

**WG:** Yeah, we went to school together.

**JT:** Did you write [home] much about your experiences in Europe?

**WG:** Wasn't much to say over there [he laughs]. [His wife said,] They censored the mail anyway.

**JT:** When you were in Holland, where did you used to park your tanks?

**WG:** Well, sometimes we would park them under large mountains of coal. You would just usually park them in the streets. It was pretty in Achen. That was the first big city we took going into Germany. Some of the officers there said it was worse than D-Day. It took, I don't know, probably three weeks or longer. There was a road that went through there, out of Holland, back into Germany and the Germans were trying to escape back in and we were trying to keep that road closed off.

**JT:** So did they have to fight block-to-block and house-to-house?

**WG:** Yeah

**JT:** What role does the artillery play when you're trying to take a town?

**WG:** The artillery played a big part, of course, when you are fighting house-to-house, we couldn't use it a lot.

**JT:** Do the civilians get in the way when you are trying to take a town?

**WG:** Yeah, uh, there was a dead German woman laying in the street for several days. Some of them, you know, didn't get out of the way.

**JT:** When you think about the war, what do you think about first? What is strongest in your mind?

**WG:** Well, I think World War II was a good thing. If we hadn't stopped Hitler, he would have took England next.

**JT:** Does it get hot inside a tank?

**WG:** No, it got cold. Ours was powered by two nine-cylinder radial engines. They were air-cooled; only warm spot you found was if you could get out and

get under the exhaust, or out there at the back end, you could stand there and get warm. The metal was cold, your feet was cold.

**JT:** Would you try to sleep in it at night?

**WG:** Yeah, you had to...I'd smooth out the 30-caliber boxes and curl up on them, where I slept.

**JT:** Wow. At least you weren't wet though, right?

**WG:** No, always dry. The infantry boys, they had it rough.

**JT:** Was there a competition at all between the infantry, or the tank boys, or the artillery?

**WG:** We loved the infantry, when you'd get [your tank] in town, they was our eyes and ears; they could peep around the corners; if they needed us, they'd always motion.

**JT:** Did they communicate by radio with you, or did you use hand gestures?

**WG:** We could just see them. We couldn't talk to them on radio. We could hear our company commander on the radio, and our battalion commander. He could talk to the fighter pilots; he could call in.

**JT:** Did you have to worry much about the German planes?

**WG:** You know, they wasn't supposed to have an active Air Force, but every night there would be one out, aggravating us. We had to take our tank maintenance there after. I think, Christmas Eve, we had a pretty big fight. We caught a German convoy out. The gun got to where it operated the big one. If we was on a slope, why it'd just roll back and we had to take it to maintenance that night. We went to a basement, while they worked on it and a German plane come over straight from\*\*\*; the lieutenant picked up a round straight from the floor when we'd come upstairs the next morning.

**JT:** What was your job in the tank?

**WG:** I was gunner on the big, on the big gun.

**JT:** Is the big gun hard to aim? Does it take a lot of skill?

**WG:** Well, it had a periscope, which was graduated; it was really your sight. You could operate it pretty good. It had a handle you could turn; it swing either way; then I had another [handle] and I could run it up and down.

**Triesler:** Well, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to me.

**William Gilliam:** Well, you're welcome. Nice talking to ya.