

factory manager! Once I had proven to all concerned that a blind person could do the job, I was then replaced by one of my blind clients, and I went on to the next “opportunity.” Over the course of the next several years, I qualified many jobs for the blind and was told that I was “leading the nation” every year for ten years in terms of the number of jobs qualified by a blind rehabilitation counselor.

After gaining the personal self-confidence that I could hold a job and support a family, I proposed to my college sweetheart, Sarah Bagley, by saying, “If you’ll sort the socks and read the mail, I can do the rest.” She accepted, even though her parents tried to discourage her from marrying a blind person. Ironically, in later life my father-in-law became blind himself and I helped him adapt to his new circumstances.

We were married on 1 September 1948 in the Mormon temple in Salt Lake City, Utah. In our religion, marriage is not just for this life only, but for all eternity. It gives me great comfort to know that in the next life I will be with (and see!) my wife, our eight children, and our forty grandchildren.

In 1955, our family moved to the state of Wyoming where I worked for thirty years as State Director of Rehabilitation for the Blind. In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I served as a bishop for seven years, presiding over a congregation of about five hundred people. I was told that the teenagers in the congregation especially enjoyed my friendship because they knew that I did not judge them by their appearance!



My desire to serve a full-time mission for my church was fulfilled in 1986 when my wife and I were called to serve in England for two years, sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ in the South London area. My dear wife Sarah died of cancer in 1992, but I know I will be able to live with her in the next life because our marriage was sealed for eternity. I currently live in St. Louis, Missouri with my son and his lovely family. If you would like to know more about my experiences, feel free to contact me directly or via my son-in-law’s brother, who lives near Paris and speaks excellent French:
Mr. Lynn J. Bennion

23, rue du Onze Novembre
78110 Le Vesinet
+33-1-39-76-84-02

Sincerely yours,

H. Smith Shumway
91 Lake Forest Drive
Richmond Heights, Missouri 63117
USA
+1-314-781-1894
e-mail: johnbennion@yahoo.com (my son-in-law)



H. Smith Shumway

June 6, 2004

Personal History of H. Smith Shumway in
Normandy / World War II

I was born in Salt Lake City, Utah on 27 November 1921. When the USA entered World War II in 1941, I was



20 years old and was hoping to serve as a full-time missionary for my church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), but instead I joined the Army.

On June 6, 1944, I was a 2nd Lt. and an infantry platoon leader in the First Army Division, 18th Regiment, Company B. My unit was assigned to land on Omaha Beach, in the section called “Easy Red”, in the second wave.

We rushed down the ramp of the LCI [landing craft] into water about knee deep and ran up to the beach to re-assemble there. There were dead bodies floating in the water and many on the beach. Some tanks had been hit by artillery. The confusion on the beach made it impossible for me to get my bearings. Death and wreckage were everywhere. German mortar shells were still hitting the beach. The noise from the planes, boats, artillery explosions and gunfire was almost unbearable.

There was a red-headed fellow with a very white face looking up at me in a kneeling position on the beach. I stepped back from the sight, and was given a push by a man kneeling on the ground behind me. He yelled, “Do you want to get us both killed?” He was in the process of disarming a land mine. I gestured and muttered something about the red-headed fellow in front of me. The soldier exclaimed, “Don’t worry about him, he’s dead! Just watch

where you put your feet.” I then came out of my daze and was very alert to everything around me.

We all lined up and started up the hill, one after another, following the soldiers that were removing the mines. There were explosions all around us but I couldn't see anyone firing guns at us. There were uncovered land mines on both sides of the path so we knew we had to watch our step. It seemed to take a couple of hours to get up the hill.

Before we went over the top of the hill, I looked back and contemplated the scene before me. Hundreds of ships and boats were circling in the Channel. LCI's and LST's were landing men and tanks. With planes soaring overhead, big shells bursting on land and sea, and the beach littered with men and machines, I thought of the millions of dollars and thousands of lives being spent to wage war and the tragic cost and horror of it all. At the top of the hill we had to cross a mine field, after which we dug in for a counterattack, which never came.

For the next several weeks I led my platoon, moving forward during the day and digging foxholes for the night. It was very tedious fighting from hedgerow to hedgerow. After about six weeks, we dug in and held the line.

Finally, our unit was relieved from the front lines and allowed to rest for a few days. I was able to take my first shower since D-Day--it was wonderful! One day after I was relieved, the man who replaced me in my foxhole was killed during a German counterattack. At that time and following several other close encounters with death, I felt that my Heavenly Father had blessed me and spared my life for a reason.

On July 27, 1944, a few miles to the west of St. Lo, my life changed forever. I was walking on a narrow sunken road bordered with hedgerows, about one meter behind a tank. Suddenly a horrible explosion occurred, which I learned later was due to an anti-tank mine. Immediately everything went totally black. I thought, "Something has happened to me and I don't know what, but I will be okay in a second." There was a steady, strong current of air hitting my face, chest, and legs, and I seemed to hang suspended. There was a deafening sound that just kept ringing and it seemed as if it would never stop. Finally, however, the strong current of air and the explosion died out. I started to get very weak all of a sudden and I collapsed on the ground. It occurred to me that

one of my legs might be blown off, so I used my left hand, which later proved to be the only part of my body that wasn't hit, to feel my legs. My right thigh was bloody, my left knee was bloody, and my right hand which had been holding my carbine was just numb. It was all bloody, and whether it had some fingers missing or not, I neither knew nor cared right then. My chest was starting to hurt and feeling it with my left hand, I knew it was a bloody mess also. I couldn't see, so naturally I felt my face. It was bloody also. I wondered if my lungs were punctured as my chest was an aching mass of flesh. But after drawing a few deep gulps of air, I decided they were all right. But everything was black and I was getting scared. I had been stunned at first, but now pain was engulfing me.

My aid man, Private Nonamaker, was standing by me then, and how he got to where I was so fast, I never knew. Someone asked him why he didn't give me morphine, and he replied that he couldn't give it to anyone with a head injury. He said, "How are you, Lieutenant? It's not so very bad, you'll be okay; it always seems worse than it really is." He kept talking to me in this same manner all the time he was sprinkling sulfa powder and dressing my wounds. The pain seemed lessened when the sulfa powder was administered. He was the best aid man I ever knew.

I guess I had lost a lot of blood by now because I suddenly became very cold, and asked for a blanket which was immediately taken off the tank and thrown on me. The pain which had been getting worse stopped a little as my body started to get cold and my arms and legs became numb. I kept wondering why I didn't pass out, and I sincerely wished I would.

When my aid man was dressing my wounds I remember thinking, 'Golly, maybe I am going to die. Do I want to live? If I can take a deep breath without something breaking or blood rushing to fill my lungs, I'll be OK.' When I found out that I could still breathe well, I knew I wanted to live. I was filled with hope that I wouldn't die because I could still breathe.

I remember spitting quite a bit when my aid man came up. There seemed to be a fine gravel in my mouth. And after a few seconds of thought, I decided it was my teeth. It was very hard to say anything because there just seemed to be a small hole for my mouth, and I couldn't

breathe through my nose. My tongue and face were pretty badly swollen, what was left of them. I remember pleading, "Don't cover my mouth with a bandage, or I can't breathe."

When no one seemed to be around me, I said "Somebody say something, keep talking." The last thing I remember was calling out my concern about the mines. Then oblivion came.

I woke up in a field hospital on the Normandy coast. The realization that I was permanently blind came slowly over the next few days. I asked the doctor, "Please, tell me what chances there are of my left eye being all right?" (my right eye had already been declared inoperable). He hesitated, then said, "With my experience I would say about one chance in fifty thousand." Then I knew he had been trying to let me have it slowly.

They told me my right eye would be removed, both legs cleaned out, shrapnel removed from my chest, my chest sewed up, and my hand fixed.

I asked for some Mormon elders (from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) to come to visit me so I could receive a blessing before the operation. None were available so I asked for some olive oil. Due to wartime shortages this request was impossible also. They brought me some mineral oil and I anointed and blessed myself as best I could. This brought me much needed peace of mind.

In addition to blindness, I had lost the right side of my chest, my calf and thigh muscles from one of my legs, and I had shrapnel over my entire body. Some of the shrapnel has been slowly working its way out of my body over the past fifty years! I still occasionally get a painful boil on random parts of my body; when it pops they invariably find a fine metal speck, like a grain of sand. To this day, I consistently trigger the airport security devices.

Following the injury, I spent the next two years in a variety of hospitals and rehabilitation centers, recovering from my wounds and adapting to life as a blind person. In July 1946, I was hired in Baltimore by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in the Maryland State Department of Education as a Rehabilitation Counselor for the blind. In this capacity, I visited factories and demonstrated to both factory managers and blind people that a blind person could perform a particular task. Often the blind person was more difficult to convince than the