Thomas J. Shanley 1939

Cullum No. 11425-1939 | January 10, 2004 | Died in Riverside, CA
Inurned in Holy Sepulcher Cemetery, Orange, CA



Thomas James Bartley Shanley began his military career as a cadet at the United States Military Academy in 1935. He was born in Butte, MT, the son of Dr. and Mrs. Thomas J.B. Shanley. Tom was a modest man, who always praised his father's achievements, but he was reluctant to discuss his own. While at West Point, he sang in the Catholic choir and joined the boxing team. He was the Eastern Collegiate Lightweight Champion in 1938 and the Welterweight Champion in 1939. He ended his boxing career with 25 victories in 26 official starts.

Shanley's first military assignment was to The Presidio of San Francisco. His next assignment placed him in charge of an antitank platoon of the 30th Infantry, followed by special instruction at the Infantry School at Ft. Benning, GA. Upon graduation in August 1941, he qualified as a parachutist and was assigned to the newly formed 502d Parachute Battalion. He was later transferred to the 501st Parachute Battalion and served with that unit in Panama, where he was promoted to captain. In October 1942, Shanley was assigned as the regimental operations officer of the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment being formed at Camp Blanding, FL. By June 1943, he was promoted to lieutenant colonel and given command of the 2d Battalion, which he led during tactical training at Camp Mackall, NC, and in maneuvers in South Carolina and Tennessee, cumulating in the parachute drop on D-Day, 6 Jun 1944, in Normandy, France.

In his book *Paratrooper*, Gerard Devlin writes, "The only fighting force of any size from the 508th Parachute Infantry that was able to accomplish part of its regiment's mission on D-Day was a group under LTC Thomas J.B. Shanley (West Point, 1939) then commander of the 2d Battalion. Shanley's battalion's mission had been to seize a bridge over the Douve River at the town of Pont l'Abbe, but after roaming around following the bad drop, Shanley was only able to assemble about two companies of Red Devils, most of whom were not members of his own battalion. With sunrise due in just a couple of hours Shanley decided to march for the bridge with what troops he had assembled. His group was a mile short of Pont l'Abbe when it was stopped cold by a German battalion. Seeing he was outnumbered and outgunned, Shanley recovered his wounded and withdrew to Hill 30. There for the next four days, he and his surrounded troopers repelled several strong

In another brilliant offensive move in the Normandy campaign, Shanley led his battalion in the successful seizure of Hill 131, the high ground dominating approaches to La Haye du Puit. Shanley was wounded in this operation and evacuated to a field hospital.

Tom Shanley then was promoted to colonel and assigned as regimental executive officer. He served in this capacity during the parachute invasion of Nijmegan, Holland on 17 Sep 1944 and the Battle of the Bulge during the winter of 1944 and 1945.

Shanley's assignments after WWII were varied and included civilian and military schooling. He served as the test officer in the Airborne Service Test Section, Army Ground Forces Board #1, in Ft. Bragg, NC. Then, in 1952, he earned his Ph.D. in physics from Princeton University. Next, he worked in the research and development section of the Office of the Army Field

Forces in Ft. Monroe, VA. In 1954, he graduated from CGSC and then went to Korea to command the 19th Infantry Regiment, attached to the Korean Communication Zone. Afterwards, he served as chief of the Atomic Training Team, heading USA Forces Far East, Eighth US Army, Japan. This assignment was followed by a year as a student at the National War College in Washington, DC. After graduation in 1958, Shanley served as the Head of Nuclear and Chemical Weapons Branch in the Army Chief of Staff's operations office. His last assignment before retirement was in the Nuclear Weapons Branch, Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at the Pentagon.

Upon retiring from the Army in 1961, Tom accepted a position as research and development project engineer and program manager at Philco-Ford, later named Ford Aerospace, transferring from Pennsylvania to Newport Beach, CA, where he worked until 1968. For the next sixteen years, he was on the technical staff at Rockwell International in Anaheim, CA. From 1984–88, he was the senior scientist at Optical Science Co. in Placentia, CA.

Tom was a dedicated family man and a devout Catholic. He married Agnes Danaher on 28 Dec 1945, and they had three children: Anne, Thomas, Jr., and Roger. He sang in the church choir, painted beautiful pastel pictures, and cooked a mean steak. Tom also was a little league coach and head umpire for many years. His dear wife Agnes passed away on 19 Feb 1977.

Tom was always in superb physical condition during his military career, and he maintained his excellent condition after he retired. He became a competitive runner and ran in many marathons, winning the Senior Olympic age division one year. In 1979, at age 62, he competed in a 75-mile bike race in Tecate-Ensenada, Mexico, finishing eighth in a field of 175.

Tom married Lucille Carey, a widow, on 26 Jun 1987. With their combined family of seven children and 12 grandchildren, they kept joyfully busy. Tom passed away on 10 Jan 2004 in Riverside, CA, and was buried with full military honors in Holy Sepulcher Cemetery in Orange, CA.

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