



## Bill Edwardes

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In 1943 Bill Edwardes was a 16-year-old teen looking for excitement. He decided to join the British Army and be part of the war effort.

"I'm 17-and-a-half, sergeant," he told the recruiting officer, who took him at his word. Bill's mother was horrified, but Bill was determined to do his bit.

Bill initially trained at Maidstone, where he was teased for being so obviously underage. But when he came home in uniform, he felt a tremendous sense of pride. "I walked up Holloway Road thinking I was Jack the Lad," he said.

Bill was an infantryman with the 1st Battalion of the Worcestershire Regiment. Training hard for D-Day and the long campaign that would follow, Bill was so small he could barely keep up, and was sent to a camp for under-strength recruits.

Turning 17, Bill was still below the legal age to be sent abroad. But as D-Day approached, nobody asked questions. He was tasked with being a stretcher-bearer and was responsible for picking up the wounded on the battlefield as well as deciding who could be saved and who should be left to die.

Bill Edwardes' first battle was the attack on Mouton:

*"We were just behind the infantry, crouched in a cornfield. We watched, we saw someone go down and went to them. With a group you have to look and make your own judgement. Leave the man with the bullet in his leg, to deal with the man with shrapnel in his back."*

The underage boy found himself saving the lives of his superiors:

*"There was me, a 17-year-old boy, cradling these senior officers, men in their late twenties or their thirties. Holding them in my arms, looking after them. I'd tell them 'You're lucky'... knowing full well that they might not last the day..."*

*It's surprising how quickly a 17-year-old gets hardened – not indifferent, but detached. You got accustomed to wounds and death... You came to the conclusion that how could you possibly survive when so many people were going down around you. In the morning you'd wake up and you'd think to yourself, 'Maybe it's today?'"*

Later, at the battle of Elst, in September 1944, Bill Edwardes experienced his most violent and relentless battle yet, but survived. As the death toll mounted, Bill found himself training and overseeing new recruits.

*"Was I daft? Yes and no. Consider this; I was something of an urchin. I wasn't very well educated. I joined the army. I did my primary training and within three months I'd learned to ride a motorbike, drive a Bren carrier, to fire all sorts of weapons – I was happy as Larry. It did me good. It was just the fighting bit that came later that didn't do me good.*

*"I was 12 when war broke out; I was 18 when it ended. People say to me, 'that was your youth gone'. It didn't go; it was just spent in a different way."*

### **Source For Information**

BBC History Magazine, July 8, 2014

### **Photo Credit**

Accessed December 2015 at:

<http://www.historyextra.com/feature/second-world-war/revealed-boys-who-lied-about-their-age-fight-ww2>