

**Robert R. Bull
Veteran**

**Mike Russert
Wayne Clarke
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on
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Amsterdam New York**

**Interviewers: I
Robert R. Bull: RB**

I: Could you give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth please?

RB: Robert Ray Bull. January 31, 1918.

I: Where were you born?

RB: I was born in Boston, Massachusetts.

I: What was your educational background prior to entering military service?

RB: I had eight years of school. I graduated from high school.

I: Where were you and what was your memory of the event when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

RB: I was stationed in Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. That Sunday, December 7th, I was writing a letter to my mother and to my girlfriend. I heard it on the radio. I had two more months of my service to get out.

I: Being in service prior to the beginning of the war, were you drafted or did you...?

RB: I was drafted. March of '41.

I: Where did you go for your induction?

RB: I went to Camp Upton in Long Island.

I: Could you tell us about your time of being in service? Your training and so on?

RB: We were shipped from Camp Upton to Fort Belvoir, VA for engineer training. I went through seventeen weeks of engineer training to become a combat engineer. From Fort Belvoir, we were shipped to Camp Claiborne, LA to build a railroad between Camp Claiborne and Fort Polk. Right through the

swamps. We were working on that when Pearl Harbor came. We went on alert for two weeks because they thought we were going to have to go to the Pacific. But then they said, "No we're going to attack the Pacific." So we stayed and finished the railroad.

In '42, I was with the 711th Engineers and they were transferred to the Transportation Corps at that time. They were shipped out and I was left back as a cadre to open up a replacement training school at Camp Shelby, MS. I was a tech sergeant by that time. The replacement training school was [unclear] too and they decided that they didn't need that anymore, so they closed that. I was sent to New Orleans to take a warrant exam. I passed the exam and was assigned to a 743 [unclear] battalion that was just activating. I was a supply officer for the battalion. That was '43.

I: What were some of your duties?

RB: It was mostly supply. In this country, it was mostly outfitting their unit to go overseas: getting all their supplies together, their guns, and everything else. Getting their training program in.

I: When did you end up going overseas?

RB: I went overseas in July '44. We were supposed to go earlier but they didn't get the beach cleared for a railway battalion to get in so they held us up here. When we got there, we were supposed to be able to go into Cherbourg [France] but Cherbourg wasn't cleared yet. We had to go into England. We were in England for about a month before we finally got our OCI's and went to France.

I: Where did you land?

RB: On Utah Beach.

I: What kind of specialized equipment did you bring with you with your unit?

RB: We had all our heavy equipment: our bulldozers, and our bridge building equipment. We had four half-tracks and four .50 caliber quad machine guns for each half-track. Nine-hundred eighty people in the battalion. We had twenty-four officers.

I: What were some of your duties once you arrived in France?

RB: We were supply. The hardest part was locating which port they came in or what place they came to place up equipment that the units needed. I've traveled all of Western Europe looking for supplies. We started out at Le Havre and we moved up to Antwerp. The port wasn't opened yet. They hadn't cleared the Germans out of the River Scheldt. After that got cleared, we opened up the port.

From then on, we brought in a lot of heavy equipment. We kept that up right through the end. At the Battle of the Bulge, we thought we were going to lose it [the port of Antwerp] but we didn't.

I: What do you mean by that?

RB: The Germans were close to coming back. They wanted the port of Antwerp. The infantry held them up and got them to stop.

I: With your unit, when it looked like perhaps there was going to be a breakthrough, did you go to the frontlines at all?

RB: They never took any of us because we were all technical people. They never asked us to go. I was in a lot of it because I was delivering supplies up there to those train crews. They had to keep coming back farther and farther.

I: How close was the rail line to the actual battlefield?

RB: You could hear the artillery. That's how close it could get. They kept us as close to the infantry to get the supplies to them.

I: What kind of locomotives did you use?

RB: We had both steam and diesel. Towards the end we had just diesels coming in. Some came from Schenectady [in New York]. Some of them came from Ohio.

I: So you had primarily American equipment?

RB: American equipment, yes. The local equipment was all practically shot up so we put all our new engines on-line.

I: So basically you followed the front?

RB: No we stayed right at Antwerp. Other battalions came in and took over different lines but we had to get the equipment out of the port---

I: So you were assigned to the port itself?

RB: To the port. Everyone has a staging area where we used to make up the trains so that the other crews would pick them up.

I: Were there ever any times when you thought that supplies were short?

RB: It seemed to me like we had an awful lot of equipment stored in all the depots around the territory. We were under missile attack continuously. The V-bombs. V1's and V2's. We lost a lot of men that way.

I: Did you ever experience V1's or V2's coming in?

RB: Yes. Every day and every night they would come in. You could hear the V1's coming in. When they shut off, you [unclear]. Then you hear the bang and say "Well it didn't get me that time, so".

I: Where did you usually go when you heard them? Did you go to shelters or---?

RB: Nowhere. We just gave up. There was not any place to go because you didn't know where they were going to hit.

I: Just laid on the ground.

RB: Just laid down on the ground. If you were in bed, you just laid there and prayed. There was nothing else you could do.

I: Was your port where they brought oil in? Was there ever a shortage of oil?

RB: Yes they did bring it in but then they laid a line from England under the North Sea into just outside of Antwerp into a big [unclear] dump. It got hit three or four times with V-bombs. They [unclear] got all the equipment to get it out. We stayed up pretty well on the lubrication [unclear].

I: So you stayed either in France or Belgium...?

RB: As a supply officer, I had to cover all of France, Germany, Belgium, and Holland. Wherever our unit was stationed, we had to find equipment. We were at Antwerp and when we needed the equipment for a unit there, that ship would come in or from Cherbourg. When they got a berth for a ship and it was out there, it came in whether you needed the equipment or somebody a hundred miles away needed it.

I: So most of the things you brought in were...

RB: Heavy

I: Heavy equipment.

RB: Any supplies that came into the port we would get on the trains to ship out to the depots.

I: Were you ever at any USO shows at all?

RB: There was one that the Red Cross put on at Antwerp at the Rex Theater. The captain asked me if I wanted to go to the dance with him. The lieutenant said "No, we're going to have our picture taken with our office group." I went there and he [the captain] was killed that night by a direct hit on the Rex. My little guardian angel was right there.

I: Whereabouts were you discharged?

RB: I was discharged at Fort Dix. When I came back from overseas, I was assigned to a different battalion as a personnel officer.

I: How long were you back in the states?

RB: I joined that unit in October of '45. I got back to the states about a week before Christmas in '45. I had to discharge and deactivate the 717th battalion in Boston at... I can't get the fort now. I was left to do that. All the other officers and reserves went on home. Then I came to Fort Dix and was discharged there.

I: When were you discharged?

RB: I got home just before Christmas but I was not discharged until February '46.

I: What was your reaction when you heard the death of President Roosevelt?

RB: I don't say it didn't mean much to us but we were so busy at that time. You didn't think much about what was going on at home. You had to think about what was going on where you were.

I: Where were you when you heard about the atomic bombs being dropped on Japan?

RB: May [of 1945] was the end of the war in Europe. I had the job of taking point troops up and bringing units back out to ship to there [Japan]. The bomb ended it [the war] but I thought nothing of the bomb. Finally, I realized that it meant that I could go home. Otherwise I probably would have gone to the South Pacific.

I: Did you ever make use of the G.I. Bill when you returned?

RB: No.

I: How about the 5220 club?

RB: I went through that for about a month but I had a job with G.E. I finally decided I didn't know what I wanted to do. At that time I was still confused. I finally went back to work.

I: Did you join any veterans' organizations?

RB: American Legion and the Veterans for Foreign Wars.

I: Are you still active?

RB: I'm still active, yes.

I: Did you ever keep in contact with anyone that you served with?

RB: One person. That was the executive officer--the LCI--who led me onto the beach. He later became the principal of the Scotia High School. Don Lutz. Donald Lutz. I don't know if you have ever heard of anyone in Scotia but I met him a couple of times after that.

I: Did you ever attend any reunions?

RB: No. I just forgot the army after I got out.

I: How would you say that your being in the service changed or affected your life in any way?

RB: The length of time that I was in the army during my 20's really hurt my affair with my sweetheart. After Pearl Harbor, I wouldn't even write to her anymore. I would only write to my mother. When I came back, I knew she wasn't around and I didn't want to find out where she was because I was afraid that by that time she was probably married. You don't want to hear the rest of that love story do you?

I: [together] Sure why not? [laughing]

RB: I came back home and was living with my mother down at Huffman's on Route 5. There was a post office there. One night I was up there in July '47 and I went in to get my mother's mail. They have a bus stop there. I got off and went in to get the mail. And there coming out was my old girlfriend.

So I said "Gee, where you've been?" She told me. I said "Can I call you up?" She said "Sure." So I called her up that night. That was it.

I: And the rest is history, right?

I: When did you get married?

RB: July '48. We were together for about a year.

I: Where was your wife---your girlfriend?

RB: She was Ruthie, right there.

I: But where was she when---

RB: She had come back from New York and worked for Columbia University---

I: But where was she during the war that you didn't know you lost touch with her---

RB: She was out at Los Alamos. I didn't even know. I didn't want to keep in contact with anybody but my mother because I didn't think that I was ever going to come back after all.

I: So you have some pictures for us to see?

RB: Yes but I've got one other thing to tell you.

I: [both] Sure.

RB: When we were ready to ship overseas, we were in Little Rock, AK. Half of the unit went south and my half went north up into Canada. We came back through Niagara Falls and down the New York Central [Railroad]. You wouldn't believe it! I went right by my house going over to the west shore to go down to Camp Shanks. The [unclear]man there lives two doors from me. He was out giving the engineer's orders. I said "Hi Nick!" but he did not know who I was. It was up over the hill from the railroad, but my house was right there. On my overseas, on my way back, where do you think I came back?
Into Boston where I was born. Then we came back through to New York.

I: You want to hand him that picture so I can zoom in on it?

RB: You can see the bottom there. [holding panoramic picture] That was our graduation picture.

I: When was this taken and where?

RB: 1941 at Fort Belvoir, VA.

I: What does everybody have there? What is that?

RB: They were all combat engineers.

I: Yes but what is this structure you are at?

RB: The bridge we just built. That was part of our final training for our graduation, to build that pontoon bridge.

I: Do you want to point yourself out?

RB: [points at figure in painting] Right there. That's the only living person that I know of that's left.

I: You're in the t-shirt up here then.

I: Any other pictures to show us?

RB: [laughs] Oh I've got lots of them.

RB: This is from my induction. There's a picture of the gazette.

I: When was that picture taken?

RB: That was taken in March '41.

I: Where are you in that picture?

RB: [points] I'm right here. Here's all my service records. [flipping through documents in album] I kept all those. Things we worked on in training. We had a little paper that came out. Here's a menu for 1943 [menu for Thanksgiving Day dinner]

I: Camp newspaper [camera pans to newspaper from Camp Clairborne, LA]

RB: There was somebody that kept everything.

I: I see that.

RB: [points to document] I was at the '41 maneuvers with Major Eisenhower. Here's the railroad we built. [flipping pages in album] I got better pictures of that.

I: Tell us what kind of camera did you have.

RB: I have a little 110 camera that I had from home at the beginning. Most of these pictures were taken with that. Then when I got over to Germany, I got a hold of a little 35 mm.

I: So you were able to take pictures the whole time when you were overseas?

RB: Overseas. I took them on the ships. In fact, I got some going onto the beach.

I: Where did you get the film developed?

RB: Signal Corps. I was a tech sergeant and became a warrant officer. [flipping pages in album] This here is from General Grey. [showing a letter] He gave that to us. He wrote a book. I have his book upstairs.

I: What was the book about?

RB: The Railway Service. Here's the pictures of the officers [pointing to photos in album]. Those are the officers who I took my warrant exam with. That's General Gray right there. Here's the rest of the Fort Belvoir pictures. [flipping pages] Here's the railroad we built. Here's an engine house that I worked on.

I: Where was that engine house?

RB: It was at Camp Claiborne. The railroad started at Camp Claiborne and went

through to Fort Polk. I've got a lot of pictures of that. These are staff shots around here. [flipping pages]

I: Tell us about those.

RB: You want to take those? [holds up album to pictures]

I: Sure

RB: That's when she was a young girl. That's my wife. [camera pans across pictures] This is when I graduated from high school.

I: That's you as an enlisted man and then as a warrant officer.

RB: That picture was taken by Life magazine. [indicating picture]

I: Oh really?

RB: But I don't know if it ever got in there or not. We were in training. We were the first draftees in there, at Fort Belvoir.

RB: That's the war, so... This is a time table that was made up while the war was still going on [holds up brochure in album].

[flipping pages] This is a book of Antwerp. [takes letter from album] One of these letters was restricted and this other one was after the war. Our chief clerk wrote these letters. [flips page] This picture right here was the night I didn't die. This is the night that the captain wanted me to go to the---

I: The photograph that you went to that instead of with the captain---

RB: Yes instead of with the captain and he got killed.

I: Now where are you in that photograph?

RB: [points] Right there. I kept everything. [flipping pages] Here are these big guns that the Germans had. We captured them and you know what we used them for? [holds up pictures of railroad artillery]

I: What?

RB: Building bridges. Did you ever see those pictures?

I: No.

RB: See that's the big gun. We took the guns off and gave us something to put the---

I: Oh you used the [unclear]

RB: Girders. For the girders. Never read anything about this and that's why I wanted to...

I: So that's a German 88? The gun?

RB: I don't know what it is. Maybe it says here what it is [looks at photograph] German rail...No it doesn't say what size it is. It was a big one because we could put those big girders right out on them.

[flips pages] See the mulberries? I had a warrant officer – a friend – who rode those over. That's going on into Omaha [Beach]. But I didn't go into Omaha. Somebody...

I: Now were these the ones that were destroyed in that storm?

RB: Yes. This here is unloading it. [indicating picture] Here's the OCI I went on going over to the mulberries. You got that picture. [flips page] This is in Paris. I spent a lot of time in Paris. We had a grand division in Paris and I used to go there...

You want a picture of my port passes?

I: Now is this you with the wing? [picture of RB with plane]

RB: We had to clean up those direct planes off the railroad tracks. We had to [unclear] to put them in. These are the two port passes that I had. This was my JG.

This was just going over. That was probably around Antwerp [indicating photos]

I: Now these are all photographs that you took?

RB: I took everything. All these small ones are mine.

I: The entrance into Paris? And German prisoners?

RB: Right. That was going into [unclear] This is some bombed out place [flipping pages] Here we are. We moved half-tracks on flat cars and took them with us. These here I got them and I'll show you. We had our own beer car. They used to send it over on the ships. We would get it brewed over there and then we had our own beer. That was one perk of being in the railway unit.

I: I guess that is something that you did not distribute then, huh? [chuckles]

RB: Yeah. And these are just pictures...That was a patrol unit I had along the canal. All tech sergeants. I was in charge. [chuckles] I was taking her picture

[looking at picture in album] You know what I was taking a picture of? The German girls skinny-dipping in the canal. [laughs]

I: Didn't have a telephoto lens with you huh?

RB: This picture here is one you should get. I just got that locomotive cleared. This thing here. I don't think you'll be able to get that. It came out of Schenectady in April. [indicating picture of locomotive] I just got it cleared to go on-line.

We were moving up. Moving up heavy equipment. I had to go find the bridges we could cross. We came to an overpass. They were all for horse and buggies days. We would have to unload everything. Go [unclear] and reload them again when we were going up.

I: Who's that?

RB: That's one of the drivers there. [indicating picture in album] I was unloading and he was looking around the rubble to see what he could find. He picked up a cane and top hat. This was the crew that I had. [flips pages] That was the table I had going over.

When I got into Paris I had a hotel room [tapping picture in album] I had a mess for the whole area. [flipping pages] There was some of the port I took. I take a picture once I go through it.

This is the Autobahn. I was taking a convoy up. A motor pool. Every time the unit moved up, I moved the motor pool up unless I stopped there...

I: So this is the Autobahn? [indicating picture]

RB: Yes. We used it for everything. For transportation, to go [unclear]. We used it for the fighter pilots. They stored the gas in-between.

I: And it's still being used over there.

RB: It's still being used?

I: Yes I was there six years ago.

RB: Oh yeah?

I: I was stationed there with the army for nine months.

RB: There were not any bridges then. They were all gone. The Germans had them set with charges so that when they wanted to [unclear] they could blow them. They would drop right down in the center section so they became useless. So we built roads around them.

After we started moving, we picked up a lot of small German passenger cars and we made them into our barracks. Each officer had one. Paul and I had one. We fixed them all up. When we had to move, we hooked them up to the train and they came with us. There we are unloading after we got to a place. Here's three officers from Minnesota. [indicating photograph] They named their car The Empire Builder.

This was up on the Rhine. [flipping pages] Here's an old buddy of mine. There's inside the cars. We slept on---

I: So this is inside of the railroad cars?

RB: Yes. I don't like the [unclear].

I: Wow you guys really had it pretty nice. [camera on pictures in album]

RB: We captured them and checked them all out. Moved in. So when we moved, we moved.

I: I guess so. [chuckles]

RB: We were going to another place---

I: Sure beat living in a tent.

RB: I guess so. In fact, the only time I lived in a tent was when we landed on the beach and had to stay overnight in a [unclear] tent. From then on, we always found housing.

There is a picture you've got to take. A V-1 coming in.

I: Oh! Look at that. You took that? Look at that.

I: Had the engines stopped at that point? [camera focused on V-1 picture descending]

RB: No it didn't stop. It was ready to hit. But it was a dud. I think I have a picture of Paul...I'll look that over afterwards...

I: Now who's Paul?

RB: Paul was a first lieutenant. He was a buddy of mine. He worked supply but he worked out of headquarters in the office. I worked down the road. [looking at pictures] This is when we were in Holland. There's Paul right there sitting on that train. [flipping pages] After the war, I think we went up through Holland. Got the kids and everything there.

See this picture? We were taking the hook-up that you have in this country for coupling. We had to put these bumpers on. We got these cars over here, we had to take those off and put the bar. Every engineer who came over had to change them because the regular ones were on the ship had to be taken off by us and back.

Here was V.E. day in Antwerp. [pause as camera pans over pictures in album] I don't think anybody brought home as many pictures as I did. This was around Antwerp. This was a hit by our headquarters. One of those V-bombs.

I: It was a dud?

RB: Yes. So they took it out of the street and put it by the building. [flipping pages] This is V.E. day when they hung Hitler in effigy. [flipping pages] This the hook-up that we had...

This is a picture that I got. Some of them I didn't get to blow up after. [flipping pages] There's Montgomery's picture in Antwerp. [flipping pages] This is when Roosevelt died. See the half mast flag? On the north yard up there. Outside of Antwerp.

I: Now these photographs here, are those in Antwerp?

RB: All of Antwerp, yes. Schenectady Museum wants these pictures but... My oldest son is a history major in college. He says "No, they're mine". [laughing]

Here's one that came down that was a dud. I think that's the one that I---

I: The one that showed it coming in.

RB: You want that?

I: Sure. [camera zooms in on picture]

RB: You know they had a lot of slave labor. That's why a lot of them were duds.

I: I heard that some of the Jewish people from the concentration camps played around with the gyros. And so—

RB: [unclear] Only trouble is you didn't know...

I: Yes. That's right. Always hoped the one coming your way had the guidance...played...with.

RB: Here's a bridge that just got finished. [camera focuses on photo] This was up in British territory. Roosevelt Bridge.

I: So is this after he died? You named after---

RB: Yes they named the bridge after him.

RB: I don't have anything more except bridges. [flipping pages] There's a fire [unclear] with the convoy but it was one of ours. He worries for a minute though. This is just some of the railroads and things. Here's coming home out of Le Havre [France]. Finally after two years.

I: Now does your whole unit come back together?

RB: My unit stayed but I came back with a different battalion because I had so many points...

I: That's right. I forgot you said you were...

RB: Lots of pictures. They kept pretty well though, for sixty years.

I: Yes they have.

RB: [flipping pages] Yeah here we are coming into Boston. The band was out to greet us. [camera focuses on photos]

I: All right, well thank you very much.