

**Gerald J. Bulger
Veteran**

**Mike Russett
Wayne Clarke
New York State Military Museum
Interviewers (INT)**

**18 February 2005
Veteran's home**

INT: This is a home interview, Greenwich, New York on 18th February 2005. Approximately 10 am. Interviewers are Wayne Clarke and Mike Russert. Please state your full name, Date of birth and place of birth please?

GB: Gerald J. Bulger. I was born in Cambridge, July 17th 1925.

INT: What was your educational background prior to entering the service?

GB: (Laughs) Well, I was a little behind in school. I was in my sophomore year and the war was on. I turned 18 and was drafted. So I went into service and when I jumped back out, I finished my education, high school. Then I went on to business school, did 2 years there.

INT: Okay. Do you remember where you were and what your reaction was when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

GB: Yeah. My father and I were listening to the New York Giant football game. I looked across the street, there were interruptions.

INT: How did you feel when you heard about this? Did you and your father talk about this?

GB: I really don't know. We were shocked with what's going on.

INT: So you were drafted into the Navy?

GB: Well, I was drafted. Then I chose the Navy because-I always laugh about it-I chose the Navy because I could swim. (Both Laugh) That's what happened to me.

INT: When were you drafted?

GB: October of 1943.

INT: When did you go for your basic training?

GB: Samsun.

INT: What was Samsun like when you went there?

GB: It was quite a station.

INT: By 1943, it must have been built up pretty much.

GB: Oh yeah, yeah. I was in the company there and there were a lot of companies.

INT: How long were you at Samsun?

GB: Well, I went in October and I think I got out of Boot camp in December, that year. Then I came home and they assigned me to a radio school.

INT: Where did you go for radio school?

GB: I went to Bedford Springs, Pennsylvania. Thats where they had it for 5-6 months there.

INT: Were you a radio operator or repairman?

GB: I was a radio operator. When I got [Unclear] .

INT: After you left radio school, were you assigned to a ship or.. what happened then?

GB: No, no. I come home and I was sent to California. And I stayed around -I can't remember- I think it was around July of that year that they put me on a ship and ended up in New Guinea. And from there, I was around until I got assigned a ship. And I had to go up to Hollandia. That was the upper part of Guinea, and that's where I got to aboard the ship in, I think, September.

INT: What ship were you assigned to?

GB: The USS Orestes.

INT: What kind of ship were you assigned to?

GB: That was a PT tender.

INT: (Shows picture of ship) Why are there signatures on there? Why do you have this? What is the significance of all the signatures?

GB: Well there were all there and I thought of something like this. I had the thing blown up.

INT: This was a reunion that you did?

GB: Yes, yes. Last September. I said it'd be nice to have the guys sign it and keep it. So I sent this out in the mail to the ones who couldn't come because they were sick or something. And I got a few responses there. One came from Colorado. He was quite tickled. He had a stroke and everything. But he says he's going to see his doctor and says, "I gotta take that show him there". (Both laugh). You know, they appreciate things like that.

INT: Mhmm. What was it like on the seas? What kind of duties did the ship do being a PT Tender?

GB: Well, they called it an A-frame. We did temporary work for the PT boats, you know? If there's something wrong with them, or the motor wasn't working or the engine, you know. We would be able to pull it out of the water and take care of it.

INT: Now did they take it up on deck, or...

GB: No, it was like an A-frame on the side and you drop it in the water and then they raise the boat up. They then, they can work on it.

INT: Could you tell us, were in any actions at all?

GB: When we got to the Philippines, yeah. Let's see now. I have to remember. I boarded the ship in September. And they invaded the Philippines in October, I think. And then we were in the second convoy on the seventh fleet from out of New Guinea into the Philippines. We were still active there, they were bombing us and things like that. Then the 26th of December we went on a convoy up to Mandor. We left the 26th and we never got any sleep because we were attacked all the time up through by suicide planks and things. And at the radio shack, I was signed to a twenty millimeter gun because they had some in the radio shack. That was my duty. General quarters. We never got off, they were at us all the time.

INT: Your ship was hit by a kamikaze?

GB: Well before we got there, we had a -I think it was Burke- he was carrying ammunition and one of them kamikazes came in and hit the ship. And I was coming out of the radio shack, it picked me right up. I was probably two or three feet, I thought we were hit then. I come down on my fanny and not so far from us, it blew up the whole ship. We had one survivor. They picked up one survivor. It was quite an explosion. We were active all the time. They were at us all the time. When we got to Mandor, they said they'll give us \$3 to you to get hit with suicide planks. And I think it bought right. We got hit, about 2 or 3 hours after we anchored and everything.

INT: Where you on the radio shack or on your gun?

GB: I was on the twenty millimeter. My job was to put the tension on the magazine. The gun jammed. (Laughs). It was Richmond, he ran towards the plane. The plane was coming in this way and our gun was here. He ran towards the plane and I ran -well we had reafers, a refrigeration thing, and I always say I went in there for protection. Because you know, the man upstairs, God told me to get out of there. And I ran around the wheelhouse and I landed only maybe twenty feet beyond that, the plane and the bomb hit right there where the reafers were. So I was kind of close. Two fellows beside me were killed and I landed on top of two fellows and I took most of that for them I guess. Then after that, Rodrigues, he was our chief, he picked me up, he was bleeding and he says, "I'll get you down on the deck." Lower deck, you know? I thought of the old abandoned ship and I yelled to a guy in the water, cause I had the lifeguard on and I said I'm gonna throw myself in and he says, "I'll watch ya". I come up, you know, and then the PT boat came, and I pulled myself up on a ladder and they pulled me up the rest of the way. They took me down to the destroyer, I guess and kinda give me some morphine. They got me to

shore. They had a train. A mandor, a flat bed. We started on the train, the darn japs were bombing us. We had to stop. Here I am. We were targets but we finally got to the place where they operated on me. They put a body cast on me. There was so much going on. It took me hours and hours before they got to me.

INT: Now where were you hit?

GB: Well, my right leg toes were shattered. My shoe was blown off, my heel was gone, and I had a broken leg. I hit shrapnel and my back and just all over me. They put me in a body cast. From there, they put me on a ship and took me back to laggie ? and they put me in another hospital ship which brought me to Hollandia, New Guinea.

INT: Did your ship sink?

GB: No, nope. Matter of fact, they got onto it and worked on it. They got it going and got it back to the United States. They were on their way back when the war ended. They were in Hawaii. They were bringing it back, yeah. So it was quite an Ordeal I guess.

INT: How much time did you spend in the hospital?

GB: Twenty seven months. It was fifteen active duties and I was twenty seven months in the hospital. December 30th to May 2nd, 1947, I got discharged. When I got back, you know there were a lot of things they had to do to me. Operations, and they took the infection off which was below the knee. I was running after that. I was running temperature. They discovered I had gangrene in the wound up here. Cause when the doctor pushed it, he's seen the bubbles coming out. They had to take it right off. They saved me. (Laughs) It would have killed me, but they got it.

INT: This says there were 52% casualties.

GB: Yeah. There were about 300 on there. So you can imagine, there's a 150 who were killed or wounded.

INT: And that was all the result of that one kamikaze?

GB: Yeah it was a bomb on the kamikaze.

INT: So you were discharged out of a hospital in Philadelphia.

GB: I came to San Francisco and they took me to (UNCLEAR) Island, and that was a naval hospital. I always tell the story that they unloaded the ship and I was the last one off. (Laughs) But then I got there and of course they operated on me. I went down to about 75 pounds. I was about a 140 pounds at the time. My mother came to see me and that picked me up. It made me feel better and everything.

INT: Now this Rodriguez that helped you, what was his role in the ship?

GB: He was the head of the radio shack. He was the chief but he got into some problem. He was first class. he was clever. We used copy plane language. Sometimes, he was on there. He talked to us just like I'm talking to you, and he would swim. He was clever, oh he was good. (Laughs)

INT: He was wounded also you say. What happened to him?

GB: Yeah, yeah he was. Well, he came back to Hollandia, and at the reunion he said that him and another fellow came up there to the hospital in Hollandia. They went inquiring about me. The nurse told him there that he had died. So he thought that. We finally got it going in 1986 I think. I called him in California. He was in California.

INT: They must have been surprised. (Laughs)

GB: Oh yeah yeah. That's right. (Laughs).

INT: Is he still living?

GB: No he died here about three years ago. He had stomach problems. Matter of fact, when we were at a reunion down in Florida, he got sick on a cruise and they had to take him off. He finally went back to California and then he died. You know, stomach problems.

INT: Do you remember, I guess you were probably in the hospital when president Roosevelt died.

GB: No, nope. I was on the ship coming back. When was it, on April of '44?

INT: Oh yes yes. Do you remember how you felt when you heard about that?

GB: It was quite a thing. Surprise and everything. But I didn't come back on a hospital ship. I came back on a liberty ship. They had nurses and doctors on there and everything.

INT: Were you suffering at that point?

GB: Oh sure sure.

INT: How was the care you received on that ship?

GB: Well, there was a black boy. He took care of me more than the doctors or the nurses. I can't remember his name but he was good. They always said that I had pain. Of course they give you morphine and Demerol. So I had a shot one day (Laughs), and I didn't feel it. So I said that to the corpsman and the nurse. So she says, "Well, we didn't want you to be a dope addict. We watered it. And I made up my mind then, see if I can stand the pain. I did. Made out alright. Then, I came back to Philadelphia. Had a lot of operations. I had a lot of bed sores and they had to operate a little more when I put on a little weight on. Cover up things."

INT: After you were discharged, did you ever make use of the GI bill?

GB: Yeah. When I was a sophomore, I took correspondence courses when I was feeling better. When I came back in May of '47. I went up and took the regents of social studies, history and English. I passed them. (Laughs) Sixty five but I passed them. I had credits from the service. I went back senior year and graduated from high school in '48. There was several boys on the same boat. They graduated earlier, '46, after getting out of the service.

INT: Did you ever make use of the 52 20 club at all? That was unemployment insurance, \$20.

GB: Yeah, I made use of that.

INT: Did you join any veterans organizations?

GB: I was voted in the legion, life membership. When I came home. They raised money and they gave me a car. 1946. I was able to drive and things. Yeah.

INT: Right after you got out, did you stay in contact with anyone at that time that serviced with you or was it not until later on?

GB: I think it was later on.

INT: When did you start having reunions?

GB: I think 1986, in Boston. See, I belong to the PT bulletin corporation. We're part of that. That's what it was. PT boat National reunion and that's how it started. We used to have it every two years and now we have it every year because (laughs) there's not many of us left.

INT: One other thing, you sent us a copy of a photograph of yourself. Do you remember when and where that was taken?

GB: Probably when I was home at the end of October to December of 1943.

INT: Thank you very much for your interview.