

**Robert Booth  
Veteran**

**Robert von Hasseln  
Interviewer**

**New York State Military Museum  
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RVH: Interview of Mr. Robert Booth in Syracuse Armory, 29 March 2001. The interviewer is Lieutenant Colonel Robert von Hasseln. The videographer is Mr. Wayne Clarke. Mr. Booth, tell me where were you born and raised?

RB: Born in Olyphant, Pennsylvania. When I was four years old, we moved from Olyphant to the city of Scranton where my grandparents lived. That's my maternal grandparents. One of the first memories I have of my mother [is when she] took me from the apartment we were in up to Providence Square in 1929, which was the equivalent of maybe four city blocks. We crossed over West Market Street and the bank on the corner. There were people lined up trying to get in and there were people coming out crying and sobbing. Of course, you know what 1929 was. That was my first introduction to such things as inflation, which my mother talked to me about later. The fact that it's bad right now, but not everybody was in bad shape. My father worked all during the entire Depression. For a matter of fact, in 1932, he bought lumber and had a cottage built for us at Newton Lake. That's just outside of Carbondale, Pennsylvania. From 1932 on through 1942, the day that we got out of school, we packed the old Ford, took it up to the lake and came home on Labor Day. We did that for ten years.

I guess I was about twelve years old, I started swimming quite a bit. I swam before and dove when nobody was around, but I started swimming across the lake, which was a mile. I swam around the lake, which was three miles. I kept so busy running and swimming, I weighed one hundred twenty five pounds when I went into the service. One hundred sixty five when I came out. Most of my upbringing was the Scranton schools, kindergarten, right on up to senior high school. I went to Scranton Technical High School and took an electric shop [course]. What I learned there I used some of it on occasion, but I got involved with a friend who got me a job at an Acme Market. It was part-time, after school, Saturdays all day, Friday nights from four o'clock in the afternoon until nine

o'clock at night. I took care of my older brother who was crippled from an injury at childbirth. He had no control over any of his bodily functions. I was responsible for him because my mother couldn't handle him totally. I took him, picked him up out of his walker that we kept him in. Took him up to bed, cleaned up after him, things like that. So I had a lot of responsibility for a young person.

In 1941, right after Pearl Harbor, he had been in the hospital for blood poisoning. They brought him home in an ambulance, and evidently he took a chill or something. On December 13th, I was watching him and I had him up in bed. I went down to listen to the radio and he started crying out. He wanted something, so I gave him a drink of water and turned him on his side because he got cramped. I turned him to his side and I said, Okay, now you can go to sleep. I was downstairs and said if you want anything, call me. He didn't call, didn't call. The next morning, Sunday morning, I went to church. When I came back, he was in a coma. I called the doctor. The doctor came out and pronounced him dead. It had nothing to do with the war except the fact that I thought he was going to have a cat fit when he found out the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. He was worse than I was.

RVH: Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor? What you were doing.

RB: I learned on the way home from church. Somebody hollered at me as I was going down the street. They hollered about the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor. Right off the top of my head, I didn't know what Pearl Harbor was, but then they started talking about Hawaii. I knew where that was from geography lessons. We had our Christmas for the balance of the kids. I had two younger sisters and two younger brothers, so we had Christmas for them. After that, I basically started going back to school. Because when he was in the hospital, I went from high school, walked to the hospital and stayed there until eleven o'clock at night. I took my books and homework and did what I could. And the next morning, I was off to school again. As far as my brothers and sisters are concerned, they are all well. My older sister passed away. She had Alzheimer's disease. She just passed away about three years ago. As I told the Marine [Wayne], I have two brothers who were Marines, not during World War II, of course. They were a lot younger than I was.

But when we got through high school, I guess August 1st, we knew...there were three of us. Bob Williams was a Marine. Jim Gillespie, who went to basic training the same as I did, at the same time. Jim was taken prisoner at the Battle of Ardennes. He was with the 28th Infantry Division. My friend Speedy [Bob] Williams had a plate in his head and in

his arm. Used to tease the hell out of him. He got married to a young lady who was a friend of mine, not a girlfriend, but just a friend. We buried her last year. He died back around 1972. He had a son. His mother passed away, as I said, last year. I think it was August. He had the same thing she had, colon cancer and died in December. They have three daughters that are married and live well down in Scranton.

RVH: As I recall from reviewing your files, you were in the Pennsylvania State Guard before you went into the Army?

RB: Yes. I got a call from a cousin of mine who was a banker. He asked me if I wanted to join the State Guard, which was a replacement for the 109th Infantry Regiment. He told me that some of my schoolmates were joining. I talked to them and they said, come on down. I went down and joined them. I spent a week in Indiantown Gap. Took a fifty-mile walk with a pack on my back, combat boots. We did some firing with a Reising submachine gun and with a shotgun. We didn't have an Army rifle at that time. They didn't give us a Springfield or a Garand because I don't think they had them available at that point.

RVH: What kind of uniform did you wear in the Pennsylvania State Guard?

RB: An olive drab work unit. We never got dressed up in dress uniforms.

RVH: What other kind of training did you do besides marksmanship?

RB: We read some of the Army manual. I'm looking for a word. Not Commandments, but the Ten Rules that you must abide by.

RVH: General Orders?

RB: General Orders, those are the words. As a matter of fact, I still have my book at home that I got from the Army. On August 1st, we were all turning eighteen [that month], the three of us. We all went down to the draft board and told them that we knew we were going to have to sign up by the 15th. Because that's my birthday, and the other one was the 8th, and the other one was around the 12th. It was 3 different dates. So we told the fellow who was a football coach for the Catholic high school, Topper Tye, we knew him well. We told him, Topper, look, there's no sense of us screwing around. Get us in and let's get us moving. Within a matter of two weeks, we were down to Wilkes-Barre for induction. They gave us, I forget how many weeks, but it was several weeks before we had to go back down again and get sworn in and whatever else, the whole examination. I opted to go in the Navy because I felt that water was my thing. Speedy wanted to go in the Marine Corps and they took him. They did their eye exam for colorblindness [on me]. Swabby flipped them to see if I could see the numbers. Well, he went so fast I didn't get a

chance to focus to see what it was. I found out years later that I was not colorblind. I went through the book and every number that was there, I was able to read. And that was not after any major surgery or anything like. So anyway, Jim Gillespie and I went together on November 1st, which was my mother's birthday. Got on a train in Scranton, went down to Wilkes-Barre. From Wilkes-Barre, we went to Berwick, Pennsylvania. And from Berwick, we went down to Indiantown Gap, where again we went through a series of examinations, physical tests, and so forth.

We were there, I think, for about a week. I'm not quite sure how many days it was. Gillespie and I got on a train and wound up down at Fort Eustis. We were in the fourth training class, D Battery. A lot of the cadre in that battery was over with us in the 581st. But before we went overseas, we also went down to Camp Stewart, a big anti-aircraft artillery installation, as was Fort Eustis at the time. I've been to both of those places since, and you'd never recognize them. The only one that I did recognize was the Fort Eustis main gate. There's a big warehouse with a railroad track alongside, and I remember that. Let's see, at Fort Eustis, I think we finished up... I know I put the date in there because I went down somewhere and got a picture along with all the guys that were in that unit. I think it was February 23rd, if I'm not mistaken, that we graduated from there. I got fifteen days to go from one end of the fort to another where I got put in a replacement camp. They let me go home, and I had to be back in fifteen days. Gillespie, at the same time, was sent to Fort Gordon. He got in the infantry. They sent me down to Camp Stewart where I got put, first of all, in another replacement unit. But they asked for volunteers and I said, what do you want me to do? [They said] We're building log roads, gun emplacements, ranges for bazooka and hand grenades. Didn't sound too exciting, but by the same token, it was away from the barracks. We did a job. The fellows that worked along with me all pitched in, worked like a team. I think that was basically the objective behind giving us that kind of a job. We did that, and then they called me in and told me that I had fifteen days to go from Fort Eustis to Camp Stewart. So I went home again for fifteen days. Well, not fifteen days, but fifteen days between the time I left and the time I got to Camp Stewart. There I got put in another waiting replacement organization or camp, whatever you call them. But not too much to do. I took drafting classes in school. They asked if anybody could do the mechanical drawing. I said yes. I just graduated from high school. I took some night courses. As a matter of fact, when I went back to school in September of 1943, I attended a class in North Scranton. I knew the instructor. I wasn't supposed to, and he wasn't supposed to let me, but we did. By October of 1943, I had finished my entire year's work, instead of going through until June of the following year. We didn't do that; we finished our classroom work in just a couple of months. And of course I had a lot of help, a lot of good guidance. [If you] paid attention to them, you

became a good draftsman. But the people down there evidently didn't want me at that particular time anyway. The first thing I knew, I got assigned to the 581st, who had just come down from Long Island. They were a halftrack outfit in Long Island. They provided protection for the...what airport? [ponders] One of the big factories that produced airplanes like crazy.

RVH: Republic? Grumman?

RB: Grumman. Yeah. They [581st] were there for probably eight months. Then they came down to Camp Stewart, and that's where I met up with them. We were there from probably August through early December. We got on a train in early December. We had all of our guns cosmolined and packed, waterproofed. We had 40mm guns. We had four .50 caliber anti-aircraft artillery guns on the searchlight trailer. M1 Directors tracked airplanes, and then the 40mm coincided with that. They found out that they didn't work too well. We were better if we had our own gun sights. We took electronic gun sights away and put Navy gun sights on. We just couldn't miss them then. [laughs]

RB: And this was with the 40mm?

RVH: 40mm and the M51, which was four .50 caliber machine guns mounted on a searchlight trailer. Some of the other units had half-tracks with four .50 caliber machine guns. Again, that was another battalion that was a part of the 49th Anti-Aircraft Brigade. There was a 90mm gun section involved there. I wasn't involved with the 90mm. I trained on them at Fort Eustis, but I did not use them in Europe. I was on the four .50 caliber machine guns, the M1 unit.

RVH: Let me just clarify some questions here about the equipment. The .50 calibers were quad-mounted?

RB: Quad-mounted on a 360-degree rotation.

RB: Was that what was called a Maxon mount? M-A-X-O-N?

RB: I really couldn't answer that.

RVH: And it was mounted on a trailer?

RB: It was on a searchlight trailer, the anti-aircraft searchlights. Took one of those and they mounted this thing right in the middle of it. Six hundred yards out there was a tower or something where, every day, we looked down the barrel and made sure that all four of those barrels were pointed at the same target. That was what they called orientation. So that six hundred yards out you hit the same thing, same plane or whatever, with the four bullets coming at them. That was a combination of armor-piercing, tracer, one lead, and

there was a fourth one. Just plain steel, I guess. But one was armor-piercing, and I know the tracer, and I know the lead, and I'm pretty certain the last one was steel.

RVH: The quad-mounted .50 was placed on the searchlight trailer between two searchlights?

RB: No, no, no, no, the searchlights. The searchlight wasn't put on. They had searchlights, but they did not use them, especially at Remagen, they didn't use them. I saw them in England being used, but we didn't use them at Remagen. That was where I said we had the largest aircraft barrage in the entire World War II.

RVH: And the M1 Gun Director was to control the fire of four of these?

RB: Yeah, you set it for horizontal and azimuth, height and low. Once you targeted it, you set it and then the gun took over and tracked it. It tracked the plane itself, but then the gun automatically followed.

RVH: Was the M1 Director used for both the quad-mounted .50 and the 40mm?

RB: No, just the 40mm. They had other rangefinders for the 90mm, but the 40mm was run by the Director. Finally they decided that we were missing too many of them.

RVH: So then they took them off the Gun Director and put them on optical sights.

RB: Yeah.

RVH: Had the 581st been on Long Island?

RB: It had been on Long Island. I would say about eight months.

RVH: And while they were on Long Island, they were using half-track-mounted .50 calibers?

RB: They had half-tracks with four .50 caliber machine guns, the same as the ones that were on the searchlight trail. The only thing, these guys were mobile. They took off with their half-track, where we had to dig out. We dug in and then we had to dig out.

RVH: But by the time the unit got down to Stewart where you joined it, they had handed in their half-tracks and\_\_\_\_

RVB: Yeah, and they got the 40mm and the M51 on the searchlight trailer.

RVH: What happened after Fort Stewart? You were talking about being deployed.

RB: Yes. We came back to New York. We stopped off at Camp Shank, which is now New City, and went through more examinations. As a matter of fact, I was so ticked off.

There was a lieutenant, and I knew better than to swing at him. He sat me in the chair and started grinding and drilling. He stopped and said, Well, how come you let your teeth go so bad? I said, What do you mean? I was inspected on a weekly basis. You fall out with your overcoat and a spoon. They checked your teeth and for social disease, hernia. I've had a hernia ever since I was born and they never found any. Even when I went overseas, they didn't find it. As a matter of fact, I didn't learn until here a couple of months ago, because it was acting up, and I went to the doctor. He told me that eventually I'm gonna have to have surgery. But this guy grinded and drilled. He went out for lunch. He came back and grinded and drilled some more. I said, when is this going to be over? He said, your teeth are pretty soft. Where you're going, you may not need them very long. Of course, I kept my cool because, as I said, if that wasn't a lieutenant, I probably would have popped him. But I passed all the examinations and we eventually got on the boat. We were in New City. They took us on a train down to the piers. We got on the boat on the 24th of December. We sat there on the 24th. We sat there on the 25th. The morning of the 26th, we pulled out and headed down to Camp Hatteras to pick up the rest of the convoy.

RVH: When you said they took you by train to the piers, you mean the piers in New York City or the piers near Camp Shanks in the Hudson?

RB: I believe we got off at the piers at Hoboken. We arrived over in Southampton, I believe it was the 2nd of January. We had no real problems. There was a burst of anti-aircraft fire off the boat. Some of our people had taken the opportunity to use it in case we got into a problem. It didn't last long. A couple of German planes came out and they scooted right off. We went over on the USS Washington. That was a boat that was captured by the British in World War I. They gave it to us to use as a transport to send our troops over for World War I. Then in 1939, they captured it again and sent it back to us so that we could get our people over. It was a good trip. It wasn't the best, but it was a good trip. We had an opportunity to get up on the deck once in a while. Most of the time we were down in the hole. We had a good gang of people and they found ways to amuse themselves by playing cards. We had a couple of southern boys who liked to do country music. We didn't mind that too bad. It can get on your nerves in a barracks, but on a ship they might be way down this end now and then fifteen minutes later they were at the other end of the ship doing the same thing.

It was exciting and yet it was serious. We were serious about going over. We knew what we were going into. We got there. We landed in Southampton, as I said. We got onto a train, went up to Reading. A big castle up there where the entire 581st was billeted. I think we were there for maybe three or four days, and they told us that our equipment

was arriving. And while they were going to get it all cleaned up, get the cosmoline and everything off of it, get it in working condition, they asked for a couple volunteers. I was always told in any Army you don't volunteer for anything. But I didn't take that as being serious. So I said, Hey, you know, you got a job for me to do, if I can do it, I'll do it. If I can't, I'll call you and let you know I can't do it. So anyway, we went up to Scotland. We were in Scotland, Greenock, Gourock. Our job was to take patients off of a railroad hospital train, carry them to the ferry, take them out on the ferry, and then take them off the ferry and put them on the Queen Mary, the Queen Elizabeth, the Île-de-France, the Stockholm, and a ship that they called Hope. We did that. The unfortunate thing was that we didn't know until almost the last day that the people we were putting on those boats off the train was the railroad battalion that went across the pond with us. They were on the same ship that we were, the Washington, when we went over. We got to talking to some of them who would talk. We had one guy from the East Scranton, Petersburg section. We got to talking to him and he told us he was from Scranton. He was in a cast from his neck down. I swear to God, that thing weighed at least five hundred pounds and two of us had to carry it. He begged us to drop him off into the water because he knew that he'd sink. We thought, hey, now look, we know you told us that you lost your manhood, and that's serious, but there's no reason for you to stop living. We are going to put you on the boat. The boat has nurses, doctors, some of the best in the world. I said, they're going to take you across the ocean and you're going to be home probably in five to ten days. Or at least a hospital near your home within five to ten days. So we got him quieted down. We put him in a special cabin, and there were nurses in and out, doctors in and out, taking care of him. As we went in, the doctors came out, and as we went out, more doctors came in. That was a serious situation, but yet one that we felt we were doing something. Not for our country necessarily, but for that individual. We survived that.

I had a friend from Pittsburgh who was with me, and our first meeting wound up with fisticuffs. He didn't like me, and I don't like him, but we turned out to be the best of buddies. We were going back to the section that we billeted in, which had a couple of English soldiers. I don't know if they were English or British, Scots, or whatever. And there were a couple of girls with them. And after a day of unloading our friends on the boat and putting them on the big boat, these two broads start saying something about the goddamn Yankees. Well, my dad was English, and when I told her that and she said, what'd you do about it? I said, oh, not too much. I just poked one of them in the face. Knocked her over a chain. Bill Simon did the same thing. We took off and forgot about it. After putting people on the boat all day that had been wounded. And the unit, we found out later, had an eighty seven percent casualty, dead and wounded. When we found that

out, we really didn't feel that bad about hitting her. I never hit a woman in my life except those two and then one in Germany, SS trooper. Revolting. That was after the war was over..

RVH: Did you want to tell us about that now or do you want to wait until we come up to time?

RB: Yeah, okay. We can wait. We went back then to Reading. We got put on an LST, landing ship tank. For a matter of fact, they put sixteen 40mm and sixteen of the M51s, and then the GIs stood alongside them on different levels. We landed up near Le Havre, took a convoy from Le Havre on up through Liege where Eisenhower had his headquarters, and then we headed over towards Aachen. They had just taken Aachen again. We just followed down, stopped every once in a while where a unit had a gasoline supply or arms, ammunition, food. A supply station. We gathered around it and put our guns in a certain place so that anybody that wasn't supposed to be coming along, like Germans or airplanes or whatever, could fire at them and screw around with them. We just didn't think that was the time to play. That was the time to go to work. We were with the First Army. General [Omar] Bradley was the commander of the entire unit, and General [Courtney] Hodges was the general that had the 581st as a part of his bailiwick. We soon got word that there was a bridge still standing at Remagen and we were supposed to go down there as fast as we could. This was sometime in February. We got in our convoys and headed down. The M51 that was ready, this first one was aimed up here, [gestures an up angle] and the second one was aimed over on this side because there were still plenty of people who sniped at us as we went through those towns. If we saw anything that looked like a gun barrel sticking out, we opened up on it. We didn't wait. We got down just outside of Remagen and we were up on the western side and went up on top of a real high mount. I think they call them [unclear]. 36.56 But anyway, there was an artillery unit up there and I believe it was part of the 10th Armored Division that actually crossed the bridge. And we no sooner got dug in and they started popping off their guns. It was one hell of a roar. It went on for maybe about four hours. One of the guys in the gun section next to us called the first sergeant, and asked what we should do. The sergeant said, if I were you, I'd probably go change my underwear. [laughs] Again, they made light of something that, you know, could have been more serious. But they set up an awful barrage. We were there to provide air protection in case the Germans decided to send some of their planes over. That was our job.

RVH: Let's hold there for a moment because we're gonna have to change tapes. Take a short break. Take two, interview of Mr. Robert Booth, Syracuse, 29 March 2001. Mr. Booth, we were talking about Remagen.

RB: Okay. We were at Remagen for the better part of two to three weeks. Our unit and my gun was one of the first anti-aircraft guns put over on the other side. We went across the pontoon bridge after the bridge at Remagen had fallen through. The Ludendorff Bridge that is. We got put over there. The 40mm gun from our gun section stayed on the west bank, but we got over on the other side, and then the bridge started expanding. They had crossed the Ludendorff Bridge, but now they were going across a couple of the pontoon bridges that the engineers had built. As I said, we were one of the first of the anti-aircraft crews. We stayed there for, I would say another week or two. Then the troops were just coming in. Some were headed north, some were going straight across, and some were heading towards the south. At that point, we were with the Seventh Army, Alexander Patch was the commanding general. He had come back from the Pacific and they brought him over to Europe. He had a Third Army group that consisted of three infantry divisions, and if I'm not mistaken, an artillery unit. We were a part of that because they were making the push to clean up everything south of Remagen. And of course southeast of Remagen almost into...well, I know they took Heilbronn. He started with the Seventh Army, went in on August 15th, 1944 and then went up the southern part of France. They had a hell of a squabble. Heilbronn was a tough, tough town for them to take. As a matter of fact, my brother-in-law's brother was there with the 100th Infantry Division. We again followed the infantry division and provided protection, from the German aircraft, for their supplies and convoys providing supplies. Back at Remagen, in the high-volume, anti-aircraft barrage, there were three hundred Luftwaffe planes and at least two dozen V-2 rockets that came through. The V-2 was still being sent into England but not as frequently. They decided they were going to spend their efforts on the Remagen Bridge and crossing the river. From there, we headed south, some of us were sent east, and some fellas went back kind of to the north. It depended on what battery they belonged to and what their expertise was. A Battery was a gun battery, but they were much larger, for whatever reason, than our gun battery. We were B Battery. The C Battery was a bit different. D Battery had the transportation, like a motor pool and stuff like that. The Headquarters Battery was a big battery. We had Colonel Howe [?], the commanding officer of our battalion, his son was in headquarters. He used to lay into him. Oh boy, when that kid goofed up, he knew it. He knew it. Again, serious and yet some fun to it. We teased him, what are you going to do to get your old man mad at you again?

RVH: So where did you end up at the end of hostilities in Europe?

RB: At the end of hostilities, we were down in the southern part of Germany near Ulm, down by the Danube. Then they rounded us up and they headed us back north, and went into what they referred to as the...we were sending people out to all the little towns. They

got all the legal papers, political papers and brought them back to this center where everything was put on microfiche or microfilm. We were there from July until October. At least I was there from July. The rest of the unit stayed there. I got transferred out because I didn't have the total points to rotate home with the 581st. So they sent me to a little town called Reichelsheim with the 456th Anti-Aircraft Battalion, a half-track outfit. We were at the Ministerial Collection Center. That was what these papers were all about. Some of us had to guard displaced persons and others with questionable political backgrounds. It was at one of these areas that we had some Germans, soldiers, and some who were trying to beat the system. This one German girl, lady, whatever, who felt like a bulldog. She came across and I stopped her. She said something about the Yankee Schweinhund. When she did, I just happened to have my rifle in place and I slapped it up against the side of her face. They called the medics and took her to the hospital somewhere. I didn't try to kill her or anything like that, but I left her with a mark. You didn't call Americans schweinhund. They weren't getting away with that kind of crap.

RVH: This was a German female soldier?

RB: SS troop. She was brazen enough to have the SS on her collar. Whether she stole them or...you could never tell. You could never tell what they were. But I wasn't taking any chance of letting them through. We had our orders. If you saw somebody with SS etched on them or tattooed on them, you turned them in, put them in the compound. We had some of that. While I was there, I got a call from my new battery commander who said, You have a letter for me? Yep, I said. It's still in the bottom of my duffel bag. He said, Well, don't worry about it. The same letter just came through channels. Your former battery commander suggested that we give you an increase in responsibility. I got two openings. I have an opening as a line sergeant. And you know what they do. You pull guard duty, sergeant of guard, training. And I think what they were trying to do was to get me to rejoin, go to the consignment line. He said, the other job gets you a T5 rating, technician fifth grade. That was what gunners on the M51s were supposed to be. I was a PFC at the time. So he gave me the T-5 rating. He said, I'm not going to tell you what it is but you're going on assigned duty. I'm still not going to tell you what it is. Be here tomorrow at eight o'clock and there's going to be a Lieutenant Davis who'd like to talk to you. The next morning, I went over to the headquarters. Lieutenant Davis was there and asked me what my background was. I told him I worked at Acme Markets and ran a cash register. He said, do you know how to run an adding machine? I told him the cash registers that they used weren't push one click here, one click there. They were just like an adding machine. They were built right in. So, [I said] if you want to know if I can run an adding machine, the answer is yes. He said, okay, I got a position for you. There's a PX warehouse in Heilbronn. Take a convoy to Stuttgart and pick up Coca-Cola rations.

You will lead a convoy up to Heilbronn, or Heidelberg, pick up PX rations. Go to Giessen, you have a real opportunity to pick up officers' liquor rations. Wiesbaden was the officers' liquor rations and Giessen was the beer rations. You will live in what we call the Paradise Club. Paradise Club was an old manufacturing plant probably ten times the size of this big room here. Upstairs were eight rooms [for] the people who worked at the PX warehouse and the people who ran the Paradise Club which was a place where troops came through, stopped and got a meal. On Saturday nights we rounded up some of the German musicians, got some frauleins to dance. We put on a dance for these guys, gave them food and especially had some breakage of the officers' liquor rations. [laughs] We treated them. We didn't do it for us; we did it for them. Those were the guys who were coming back, like the 100th Infantry Division. They were pretty well beaten up. Nothing was too good for them. Coca-Cola, all you could drink. The nice part about it was I got my T5 increase pay. I was getting overseas pay. They gave me a fifty percent increase in my base salary for working in that warehouse. I wasn't the only one. There were six of us including two drivers. They all got the same thing, but they knew what their job was. Their new job was to take care of these guys coming through because they had the hell beaten out of them. They had some real tough fighting, especially in Heilbronn, because Heilbronn was one of those places where the SS troops just weren't going to give up. The 100th Infantry Division made them give up. They did it one at a time.

RVH: This was after VE Day?

RB: Oh, yeah. This was after VE. We went to the Ministerial Collection Center. They were getting ready to go home. I didn't have the points, so I was put in another outfit. It didn't bother me. I would have liked to come home with the other outfit, but I got [unclear]. 52.09 As a matter of fact, right now I'm in the middle of having a reunion. We were in Pittsburgh. We had twenty, twenty two members of the 581st. They brought their wives or companions. So, we had forty four people. I have seventy three names right now and I have seventeen more, which makes it ninety. I'll be sending out ninety letters, giving them an idea of what we're going to be doing, where we are, what it's going to cost, and get it all pulled together. Got the motel rooms. I walked into the motel and told the lady, the manager, I can't guarantee you all the rooms that I'm going to need, but I want at least ninety reserved. On August 13th, one month before we start our reunion, you will have the number of people that are going to come and a fifty dollar check for each person that's coming. So I said, you won't be stuck. [She was] Very kind, [went] right ahead, solved that. I have a band coming in. The people like 1950s and 1960s music. They're going to have a buffet dinner on the first night. She told me that the music we wanted was 1950s, 1960s, and some ballroom [music] and said she would open up the ballroom. And sure enough, she got it pegged. We had the ballroom. And I told her, if we

don't have all those coming, give me a call, let me know and we'll take a third of it off, or whatever we need to take off. I didn't want to tie up rooms if they weren't going to be used.

RVH: How did you get back from Europe to the United States?

RB: We went into Camp Lucky Strike, which was in France, and they put us on a Liberty ship. We came back. I think the trip lasted seven days. Landed in New York Harbor and was sent to Fort Dix. They took all precautions, made sure that nothing that I had was government property, even the combat boots. I didn't want them. I should have kept a pair; I had two pairs. I just said, well, you know, somebody else may use them. Not that I hated them or anything like that. I still have my uniform. The only problem I have is I've been trying for the last twenty years...because when I got transferred from the Ministerial Collection Center, 581st, my battery commander called me in. At the same time he was telling me I was transferring out, he handed me a patch, a tomahawk. It goes on the left breast. Of course, the one [points to his right shoulder] has the First Army and the other [points to his left shoulder] has the Seventh Army. This patch, I cannot determine, and I've tried all ways. To try to find out what unit it was. I believe it was the 76th Infantry Division, but I'm not sure and I wouldn't [unclear] 56.05

RVH: We can identify that for you.

RB: You can?

RVH: Yeah. We can talk about that afterward. Tell me briefly, what did you do after the war?

RB: The first thing I did was I refused to accept the 52-20 club. I went to work for, in essence, ten dollars a week. I was making thirty dollars a week. I figured, if I took that twenty dollars and added ten dollars to it... but to hell with that. I'm not that kind of a person. I talk to myself every once in a while. The fellow who was the manager at the time cut my hours down so that it was in fact thirty dollars a week. As I said, I felt that I was working for ten dollars a week, but that didn't make any difference. Because the first thing you knew, he was going on vacation. [He said] Hey, Bob, do you want to take over the store for the week I'm on vacation? [I said] Sure, why not? The sales management superintendents came in, and every one of them welcomed me back. They were glad to hear I was back. For a matter of fact, when I first started, when I was still going to school, I had two managers who were actually in fisticuffs over me. [They argued and said] I hired him, he's not going back to your store, he's coming to my store. And they got into fistfights. I didn't want any more of that stuff. So I went in and I took over the store. I knew what I was doing. That lasted into 1947. A year from the date that I got discharged,

I was out managing an Acme [Market] on my own. It wasn't just for vacation. And I was there for 2 years in Clark Summit, Pennsylvania. One of the fellows from up almost on the New York State border wanted to get back closer to home in Scranton. His son was very ill. My boss came in and he told me about it. I said, hey, I don't have any qualms. You want me to go back to Providence? You want me to submanage these stores up here? I said, yeah, anything you tell me, just tell me what you want. He said, I've got some people on vacation. Spread out, you can take over those stores. So he told me where they were. So I went up and maybe for two or three days, I managed one store, then two or three days another. Eventually I took over a store in Factoryville in 1948 and I was there until 1951. In 1951, I was looking around to see what was going on, seeing how people were being treated. The man who got me my original job with Acme Market was Mr. Wasser, a superintendent. They made him a produce manager and gave him all kinds of hard riding. I was twenty six. He would have been probably in his late 1950s, early 1960s, and they treated him like a dog. I had a butcher. We had a store superintendent and a meat superintendent. The butcher was sixty five years old. They put the meat in a cage up at the front door.. He had to go up there and carry it back. I saw him struggling trying to pick these things up. I said, George, from now on, give me one of your coats and I'll carry that [meat] down. That went on for a couple weeks, and then this meat superintendent came in. I took this side of beef down the side and I hung it on the meat hook. When I turned it around, I said [to the superintendent], do you want to hang up there? Because I know what you're about to say. You're about to tell me that I don't have the right to carry that meat in, that George should carry it. I said, George is sixty five years old. I'm twenty six. I can hang you up there. The next time that you tell me that I can't carry a side of beef for your butcher who is sixty five years old, I'll take you and I'll put you through that door, but I won't open it. So you mind your own business. You have no reason to tell me what I can do and what I can't do in a store that I manage. I manage the entire store, not just the meat department, the entire store.

RVH: So did you stay with Acme?

RB: No, I eventually got a new superintendent who thought he could walk through my store and throw stuff on the floor because there was a dented label or a dirty label, dented can. He just took it and threw it on the floor. The last time that he did that was early in January 1952. I told him, I'm not accustomed to this kind of crap. You threw it there. I got three people working for me out in this section of the floor. I'm not asking them to sweep them up. I'm not asking them to pick them up. You do it. And if you can't do it, go down and get the general superintendent and bring him up here so he can see what you have done. He did. He brought his superintendent back. The superintendent said, what the hell is going on here? I said, nothing. As a matter of fact, I'm glad you came. I want you

to go up there and check out those two cashiers and see that their money is straight. Come back here and straighten this one out. Because I'm going to hand you the keys for the store and you can close the goddamn place yourself. I walked out.

Two days later, I was working as an independent contractor agent for Nationwide Insurance. Did very well. I was an agent for seven years. After seven years, they found out that I was doing work as a manager, not just work as an agent. I had all kinds of agents calling me all hours of the day, all hours of night. They wanted to know how to do this, how to rate that. I helped them. Eventually the regional manager found out what I was doing and he asked permission to come to the house. In front of my wife he asked me if I'd like to be a district manager. I said, it doesn't matter to me. I was having a lot of fun the way it was. I get more of a kick out of seeing these young guys making a couple hundred bucks as if I was making it myself. One day, they'll know who brought them into this business. To this day, I get calls from some of them. He offered me a job as a special agent, which would be a manager in training. In October of 1957, he came to the house again and he offered me a job as a district sales manager over in Williamsport. That meant I had to relocate my family. Of course, there was only my wife, my son and I, so no sweat. We were there for five and a half years.

I got a call from the sales superintendent and Vice President down in Harrisburg. They wanted me to go into Philadelphia. Well, before I went to Philadelphia in 1965, some of my friends, so-called friends, asked me what I'd done to get the Vice President and the Sales Representative mad at me. [I asked] What do you mean? [They said] They're sending you to Philadelphia. I said, so they're sending me to Philadelphia. So what? I intend to do as good a job, if not better, than anybody else that's ever been there. And the way it wound up, I did. I got a substantial increase in pay. I got a call from our former personnel manager down there. He was now in Syracuse. He said, Bob, I got an opportunity for you if you'd like to become a training manager? I said, what's up? He told me that they needed a new training manager in Syracuse and he'd make arrangements for me to meet the sales superintendent in New York City. I said, okay, fine. Give me the details. He put it in writing and I went to New York. I wasn't there...I don't think I was there for four hours. I took some of the things that I was doing and showed the sales superintendent and his wife all these things. I led the company in commercial production, business insurance and so forth. I led the company in my district. I shouldn't say I did, my district did. They were the guys that did the job.

They told me that one day I'd have a job out in Columbus, but I didn't want to go to Columbus. I wanted to stay on the Eastern Shore here. Anyway, he hired me. I wasn't in

Syracuse for three years, and he gave me a job as a regional sales manager over in Albany. We were there for seven years. Then they needed some commercial help, so they called me and asked me if I objected to taking a slight reduction in paycheck, but a wide open expensive account. Heck, you can't beat that. So I did that, came back, and I introduced new manuals. God, they were about that thick. [gestures about six inches] As a matter of fact, I was accused of memorizing the manual. I put on classes. One day I was up at the front behind the podium and tables and chairs on this side. I started walking down, turned around and told them, if you turn to page twenty one, second column, one-third of the way down, this is what you'll find and I repeated what was on that page. One of the guys looked over to his friend and said, that son of a bitch has that book memorized. [laughs] That went through the company. Everybody in the company called me, [and asked] how did you do that? I said, I conducted a school out there for you. While everybody else, including the cadre that you have out there, went for breakfast, I went in the room and I looked at the New England, Ohio's, Florida's, New York's manuals. I didn't have to, I said, I already got it memorized. And of course that drew a chuckle from a lot of them. And when it was all over, they said, we didn't know that. We didn't know that. We didn't know enough to do that. I said, now you know. You want to deal with New England people, you deal with New England manuals. I said, if you got four or five of them [States], then you've got four or five of them [manuals]. And if you want one state like Pennsylvania, then you've only got one manual.

RVH: You brought some items with you today. Was there anything you wanted to show us on the tape?

RB: These are the Honorable Discharge and the Separation Papers. All the pertinent information. [shows documents]

RVH: Yeah, I believe we have copies of these.

RB: Yeah, I did send copies.

RVH: Anything you wanted to show us while we have the tape going? Something in the book?

RB: Oh. [flips through book pages] This book is *2,194 Days of War*. It goes from 1938. I marked up some of it. My son gave me this book. This started in September of 1938, the year before World War II started. On each of these pages back in here, when we got into the war, that's 1939, that would be all Europe. Back a little bit further, after December 1941, that would be Pearl Harbor and so forth. [flips through book pages] December 1941, again Pearl Harbor. Incidentally, I spent some time over in Hawaii with my son.

Whenever Japanese visitors came by, they asked where the [USS] Arizona was. His response was, "Right where you left it." He had no sympathy.

Well, I will go back to 1933, and I'll talk about my mother a little bit again, what kind of person she was. I like to read. I read comics. I read the comic strip in the paper. I read certain items in the paper. I saw a picture of a young child after the Japanese bombing of Nanking sitting on a railroad track. I can still picture that today as if it happened today. I just don't have that kind of feeling for Japanese people. I don't hate them, but I wouldn't give them the time of day.

[flips through book pages] After December of 1941, you get into 1942, and it starts off with the Western Front in Europe, and it goes back into the Malaysian Singapore stuff.

RVH: Was there anything in particular in the book you wanted to show us?

RB: Not really. I just brought it to show you what it was. You go back to the Marines in such and such a place.

RVH: I think we have a copy of it in the library.

RB: Oh, okay. Well, that's good because, as I said, my son bought it for me and I've used it. And especially at the end, back in August of 1943 when we went to the draft board and told them, hey, move us along. I feel fortunate in some ways that some of the delays of being put in replacement camps helped me. It kept me from getting shot too, wounded. Not that I wanted that, but that's where I got put.

RVH: Is there a patch there that you wanted to show us?

RB: No, I don't have that patch.

RVH: The other one that's there on the table.

RB: Oh, this one here. This was given to us at Fort Eustis, anti-aircraft. [shows 82nd Airborne patch] It was also used in one of the New England states. I can't tell you which camp it was. But it was also an anti-aircraft.

RVH: Did you wear that in Europe?

RB: No, no. As I said, we had the First Army and the Seventh Army patches. Then when I was getting transferred out, my former battery commander, who lives in Liverpool, by the way, handed me this patch and told me to have it sewn on because I deserved it. The unfortunate thing was the night that he called me into his office, we had been playing football. I was running with the ball and he went down and tackled me low.

Unfortunately, the back of my heel got his nose. When I got called in, I thought, uh-oh, this guy must have thought I did it on purpose. The first thing I did was apologize to him. He had his nose all patched up. But he was a good guy. He really was a good man.

RVH: Well, we're coming down towards the end of the tape, so any last thoughts, anything you'd like to discuss we haven't covered?

RB: Well, other than my career with the insurance company. I retired ten years ago. In 1958, I attended one reunion in New York. Then there were two down in Atlantic City. They were every two years, 1958, 1960, and 1962. In 1962, I was elected as president of the 581st Anti-Aircraft Automatic Weapons Battalion Club. In 1967, I went to Washington, D.C. They wanted to have a second reunion down there. We were negotiating with that, and I got a call to go to Syracuse. That's where I went. When I got there, my job was twenty times larger than what I was doing in Philadelphia. I had seven agents in Philadelphia, and they could outrun any twenty one man districts. They whipped them every time. So, when I went to New York, I found a different type of job. [I was] on the road quite a bit. I didn't have the immediate secretarial help that I had when I was in Williamsport and/or Philadelphia. I had secretaries, but they were asked not to engage in any outside activity, such as working for the 581st.

RVH: When you look back now, because we've only got like two minutes left, when you think about your World War II experiences, does anything in particular stand out?

RB: Well, as I said earlier, the jobs that I was given, I took them, accepted them and did the best I could. That goes from the hospital trains to the ferry to the big boats carrying patients who had gone across the pond with us. That stands out in my mind. At the Remagen Bridge, the night that we went in, dug in with the artillery, fired the artillery. Fortunately, we did not have to fire our guns because there were no airplanes flying over or anything like that. That sticks out in my mind. Then the next day, we were down on the western shore of the river and about maybe one hundred fifty feet from the bridge itself. Heard the bridge crackling, heard it go down through. I was ready to go and jump in the water, but somebody said no, it'd be too cold. It was water coming down from the Alps. He said that'll be ice, ice water, you won't last in there. I said, well, if somebody else is, I'd give it a try. They said, you better not. As a matter of fact, one lieutenant came by and said, Bobby, I don't want you in there. I'm ordering you not to go in there. There are plenty of people there to do that job.

RVH: I think that's a good point to conclude on because we're just about out of tape.