

**Robert Burke Bartells  
Veteran**

**Interviewed on December 12, 2004  
at the American Legion Post, Saugerties, NY  
Saugerties, New York**

**RBB:** Good morning.

**Q:** Burke Bartells

**RBB:** Burke Bartells, R Burke Bartell. The R stands for Robert, and I never use it ----

**Q:** R. Burke Bartells... We are here at the American Legion in Saugerties, New York for the Smithsonian Veterans project and its December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2004, Sunday, it's about 11: 40 a.m. Also, here is Allen Brusinski handling the camera and the [] Brusinski who is handling the laptop. So, Burke, were you drafted or did you enlist?

**RBB:** I enlisted right after my cousin was killed. Joe Sinte, brother Jack Sinte.

**Q:** He was in the army wasn't he?

**RBB:** He was in the army, yup he was killed coming off the beach.

**Q:** In Italy?

**RBB:** In Italy, yup.

**Q:** And that encouraged you to enlist in the ----

**RBB:** It did yeah, along with me thinking I would—I might be drafted before I would finish high school, so I enlisted quick.

**Q:** And where were you living at the time?

**RBB:** I lived in 82 & ½ [unknown] New York.

**Q:** Okay, you've already told me why you joined, why'd you pick that branch and service? You joined the navy, right?

**RBB:** I thought the Navy was the cleanest, I wanted to get on an aircraft carrier. I couldn't fly because my education was too short. But I thought that's the closet I'll get to an airplane.

**Q:** So you went in out of high school?

**RBB:** I went in out of high school, I only had a year and a half of high school.

**Q:** Do you recall your first days in the service, what was it like?

**RBB:** It was tough, it was boot training, up in Samson, New York.

**Q:** Relaxed region of NY?

**RBB:** That's right, yup.

**Q:** What was it like when you got there?

**RBB:** Well when I got there it was winter time, coming on winter. And the 1<sup>st</sup> thing ya know I was drafted after 6 weeks in boot camp to the --- to Davidson Rhode Island to become a member of the CBs [laughing]

**Q:** That is the construction battalions?

**RBB:** Yup, that's the construction battalion.

**Q:** Why did they pick you for that, did you have the aptitude?

**RBB:** I had taken a test and I had passed it on motor machinist, by the way and that's what I was, a motor machinist striker.

**Q:** So you went to where in Rhode Island?

**RBB:** In Rhode Island. I went to Davidson, Rhode Island the CB base trained by marines

**Q:** Trained by marines, CBs are always trained by marines

**RBB:** Yes, they were, yup.

**Q:** So, what were your marine instructors like?

**RBB:** Oh... Rather tough to the point, but I loved them. They were good guys. I damn near drowned, but if I find out I made it to the latter anyway.

**Q:** How'd you almost drown?

**RBB:** Well because I am not a good swimmer. So, when I got my 14 day leave I swam in the Hudson river for 14 days so the next test I took I passed. [laughing]

**Q:** When was that? What year was that?

**RBB:** 1945, just before the war was over. One war was over while I was getting ready to leave for Leo Beach, California, and by the time I got to Monolore Ridge or Camp Iea this was the first place. I went in Thanksgiving Day, and the second part of the war was over.

**Q:** Where was Camp Iea?

**RBB:** Camp Iea was on the north—east side of pearl harbor. On the Anahalo, then I was transferred from there to another place called Monolore Ridge and Monolore Ridge is where the Japanese planes less strayed their last bombs and made craters which made 2 outdoor theaters of.

**Q:** You made outdoor theaters?

**RBB:** Out of the creators.

**Q:** Did you -- Where else did you go while you were in the military service?

**RBB:** Uh... that's as far as I went. Right there then I was transferred to pearl harbor. Frozen for ninety days before discharge. And you're probably going to ask the question of my support, my mother got me out of the service early, that's why I only served fourteen months, something like that.

**Q:** And it was—how was Hawaii like when you were there?

**RBB:** Uh... It was beautiful. I wouldn't mind seeing it again. I would probably ever recognize it. I remember the [unclear] Hawaiian Hotel down by the beach that the top of the corner was blown out where the stray bombs hit from Pearl Harbor... big building.

**Q:** You went to Peral Harbor as well, I suppose?

**RBB:** Later I went to pearl harbor and I was sent home from pearl harbor to be discharged.

**Q:** What was your specialty at work? What did you do?

**RBB:** I drove a tank truck feeding the showers with deasil fuel.

**Q:** And you didn't see any combat?

**RBB:** No I didn't, thank god.

**Q:** Did any people in your unit get hurt or injured?

**RBB:** No, as far as I know they told me that the second half of the alphabet was sent to Okawa and I don't know what happened to that bunch, but I don't think it was good. That was the second invasion there I heard, early part of my enlistment.

**Q:** Your guys would arrive by ship I take it?

**RBB:** Yes, we did, yup

**Q:** Was there any concern that the Japanese submarines would still be out there?

**RBB:** Well, what happened, I do remember we laid in the water for a while because the blew a boiler and they asked CB boiler to go down, go down and work on the boiler and they didn't want to cause they were going overseas, but they did, they went down and repaired it. We were worried then while lying in the water that we might be hit by a torpedo from a sub that don't know the war was over. The first part of the war.

**Q:** What was it like when the war in Europe ended? Where were you?

**RBB:** Uh... everybody was happy, and even more happy when the Japanese war was over.

**Q:** So you were in Hawaii when the war ended

**RBB:** Yes, I was, yup

**Q:** How'd you get the news? Do you remember how it was put out?

**RBB:** No, I didn't, I just know the hooting and hollering went on and that's what we found out. My co was only a Lieutenant JG but a nice guy JG Ross.

**Q:** How many people did he command? The whole CB Battalion or?

**RBB:** Well, what we had was engineer and repair shop, E&R shop big quarters elephant hut we would call it. A quantic hut and we worked out of there with electricians and plumbers and so on and that base became a station center so that all service men came in off the islands into that particular base and the waves and so on sonographers had them paper work all made up for whatever discharge and when and how.

**Q:** Big operation.

**RBB:** We got a presidential citation and I have pictures I got home, of us dressed parade receiving a presidential citation for separating so many service men.

**Q:** So you got the presidential unit citation, and what other citations and medals did you get?

**RBB:** I got just a normal ribbon, that's all.

**Q:** You got the WWII victory medal?

**RBB:** 3 ribbons, yes.

**Q:** Pacific theater medal?

**RBB:** Right, yeah.

**Q:** Did you get a good conduct medal?

**RBB:** No I didn't, but there was a crest on my conduct.

**Q:** [unknown]

**RBB:** No, but I told a story once, I don't know how much time I got, General Flanagan, Ben, my cousin Ben was a major and he radio grammed me that he was gonna be in Pearl Harbor to the air base, okay...

**Q:** Park Field?

**RBB:** Uh, no, what's the other base at the airport...?

**Q:** The army base?

Camera guy: Wickham?

**RBB:** Yeah, Wickham, I asked my C.O. if I could go and he says no, you got your duty let your cousin come see you – trying to say this fast to get it over with.

**Q:** You got plenty of time

**RBB:** But anyway, I took the tank truck and – emptied -- and I went down to the airport Jaray stopped me, told me those guys you're looking for, Major Flanagan, I says yes, he says to the marine MPS go catch that Chella bus he's on it. He got off it, got into the truck with me told me to park down below the quarters where he was staying which happened to be the judges, the quarters in the court room and I parked in his space. When I come out he told me don't worry about ill handle it and there was no problems so I went home. I went back to the base, filled the truck up went into the base and my Chief Petty Officer, Smokey sad to me, JG wants you in his office and I went in and he said "I understand you disobeyed my orders? I told you not to go, so whatever punishment you got over at Wickham field I don't want to see you missing from your duty here." No sir, I will not be missing from my duties. When I closed the base up my 45 went through x-ray and he came and told me he saved me this time but I think he got the 45 and he says "twice you're in trouble" he says to me. I wasn't in trouble at Wickham field, "you wasn't?" No, I was out with my cousin Major Flanagan. Why didn't you tell me he was a Major. You didn't ask me sir [laughing]. So, the General later on says "that's the way to do it don't volunteer information" [laughing].

**Q:** General Flanagan is a West Point graduate?

**RBB:** Yes, he is.

**Q:** Here in Saugerties?

**RBB:** Yes.

**Q:** We had him as our Grand Marshall in our 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade.

**RBB:** Yes, he was.

**Q:** He is retired, he is a 3 Star General.

**RBB:** Yes, he did, Lieutenant General.

**Q:** Served in WWII, Korea and Vietnam

**RBB:** Yes, he did, served under West Moralin, yup.

**Q:** How did you stay in touch with your family while you were away?

**RBB:** Mail, I didn't use any phone calls cause I just, all letters, little drawings and so on, I'm like Joe Sin, I like to draw a little bit.

**Q:** Did you get packages from your family? Were they able to send you stuff?

**RBB:** Oh yes, my mother was very good.

**Q:** What kind of things would she send to you in particular?

**RBB:** Food, most of the time, cookies and candies and stuff like that.

**Q:** And what was the food like that you were issued?

**RBB:** We ate the best; all the CBs ate the best. And they drank the best, Budweiser and only Budweiser. First thing we built on the base was a beer parlor and we had to sleep on the beds because we didn't put the quarters up yet.

**Q:** I can tell ya that tradition was carried on in Vietnam when I was overseas [unknown].

**RBB:** [talking over inter] Oh yes, yup, yes, they were our best friend.

**Q:** While you were in the service did you feel any particular loneliness or stress or pressure at times?

**RBB:** Not really, I did my duty, I did my job, I enjoyed it, missed home, and if weren't for my girlfriend, who I loved, I would have stayed in.

**Q:** What kind of things did people do to entertain themselves?

**RBB:** Well we had these theaters, 2 theaters one is... Camperry Theater we called it and I can't remember the other one was up by my quarters.

**Q:** And you had motion pictures and films?

**RBB:** No, I didn't take pictures.

**Q:** No, they had pictures for you to watch?

**RBB:** And they had [unknown] movies, good movies to watch. We even had Bob Hope and Bin Crosby, [unknown] Moore and uh... Jerry colion at Camperry Theater.

**Q:** They came as a USO show, yeah, I saw Bob Hope in Vietnam.

**RBB:** Yeah, once he was there, for one show.

**Q:** Where did you go, what did you do while you were on leave?

**RBB:** I didn't do much because half of my pay went home, and I only had fifteen dollars every 2 weeks, so I didn't do much, once in a while we went down, I have a couple pictures here of me going into Honolulu with a couple of the guys, cause I got, I was in charge of Interpol so I'd get a jeep and get 4 to 5 guys to go with me into town. But I didn't do much, USO maybe a movie and stuff like that.

**Q:** So, your travels while you were in included camp Sampson and Rhode Island, where else did you go? You went out to California?

**RBB:** I went to, not Leo Beach, to the island underneath the bridge in California, Treasure Island. I went down to Davisville to Treasure Island, to Pearl Harbor to Treasure Island or Monolore Ridge on Anahalo and back home to Leo Beach and discharged in Leo Beach.

**Q:** So, you shipped out of San Francisco and then when you came back you shipped back to Leo Beach?

**RBB:** Right.

**Q:** I know CBs always have a great sense of humor, like sometimes they play pranks on people, did your people do anything like that?

**RBB:** Not really, we were all serious workers we had a tough co, like I said, Lieutenant JG ross, but he was to the point and like I said he thought I was in trouble and I told him I wasn't he was a little embarrassed because it was a major and he was a Lieutenant JG.

**Q:** Can you show us your photographs?

**RBB:** Yeah, this is 1946, can ya see it? And I was an [unknown] my kids told me. I'm standing on that ship, the US Marine Pelini, that's the ship that brought me home from Hawaii to San Francisco and I decided to take these pictures and I pad 5 dollars for them and they were sent to me and I went and found them and put them on this to put in the trophy room.

**Q:** So, you came back June 1946?

**RBB:** Yup, that's it.

**Q:** And you were discharged at Leo Beach?

**RBB:** Yes, Leo Beach Long Island.

**Q:** Leo Beach, Long Island.

**RBB:** Yup.

**Q:** Did you... What was it like the day your service ended? And you were in Long Island you said, right?

**RBB:** Yes, well I had mixed feelings because I was engaged then to my, that became my wife, I was happy to get home for that, but I enjoyed it.

**Q:** What did you do the days and weeks after you got out of school, do you remember?

**RBB:** Worked, I worked hard to leave money for my mother, I know I was going into the service so I quit school in January and joined the service in May and I had about 300 given to her then.

**Q:** What kind of work did you do when you got out?

**RBB:** When I got out I tried everything, I worked first as a motor-machinist mechanic [unknown] garage and I got blood poison and I was gonna be on the GI build. So, I quit that and helped my father who was a builder and I turned out to be a builder myself, I'm retired as a builder.

**Q:** So you had your own contracting business?

**RBB:** Yes, I did. I had 12 men working for me at one tie one time I worked on the throughway I was super intendent [unknown] throughway.

**Q:** While they were building the throughway?

**RBB:** What's that?

**Q:** While they were building the throughway?

**RBB:** When they were building the throughway.

**Q:** A lot of concrete poured.

**RBB:** Oh yeah, a lot of it. I didn't do the pavement, I did all he heavy walls and dropped in bridges, I built 13 bridges, I think it was.

**Q:** So you developed some of these skills while in the service?

**RBB:** Yes, I did, I saw a lot of it too.

**Q:** So, what was your military experience like for the rest of your life? how did it effect it?

**RBB:** Well, I love construction and I still do. I did a lot around here for this place for the next/past 20 years.

**Q:** You built our new room in the museum here?

**RBB:** Yes, the park itself, this new room here, the porch downstairs, the entertainment room... I did a lot of it. Everything they've touched I was involved in.

**Q:** So you're a past commander here at this legion?

**RBB:** No, I never was commander, never wish to be either, the only time I was a head of anything I was commander of the boat club down in [unknown] creek and I enjoyed that cause all you were was a good ambassador and I guess the commander here too more or less like that, yeah, but I never went for that.

**Q:** Did you belong to any other veteran organizations beside the Legion?

**RBB:** No the American Legion is the only one I belong to and the CB down in Kingston.

**Q:** So, that's the CB association for veterans?

**RBB:** Yes, it is, for all the retired CBs yes.

**Q:** Do you have meetings and so forth?

**RBB:** Yes, we do the second Thursday of every month.

**Q:** Do you have reunions?

**RBB:** Yeah, now and again they do, yup, I don't go to too much of them, cause I don't go to too much meetings as it is.

**Q:** Do you keep in touch with the fellas you served with?

**RBB:** Oh no, I don't, I tried to reach them once when I was going over to Arizona but I couldn't find them.

**Q:** Is there anything else you'd like to add?

**RBB:** No, except that I'm glad I was in the service, I'm glad to be a member of this legion post right here, I'm proud of it, I worked hard for it, and I do the fire company too. I do the CBs. In fact, there is a lot younger guys doing most of the construction work now, they do a lot of volunteer work especially with parts they restore and so on. In fact, they are having their party... today, they're having a dinner, I'm not going to, there's too much around here to do. Joe Sinte also, who's the other cousin, I said, he belongs to the CBs too, Johnny Stanhill belongs to the CBs, pau [unknown] does, Joe, uh Tom Becker does, there is a bunch of us from Saugerties that belong to the CBs.

**Q:** So, we're going to ask you to get in touch with him so we can bring him up here for the Smithsonian Program.

**RBB:** They've been here these big CBs have been.

**Q:** I mean to be interviewed on this film program.

**RBB:** Oh yes, that'd be nice, I'll invite them.

**Q:** You'd be the man.

**RBB:** Yes, I would, I'll invite them.

**Q:** Thanks a lot Burke, appreciate it.

**RBB:** Thank you, good luck to ya's.