

Stephen B. Bull: The Man In the Middle

By Judy Bachrach

Part
2/3/74
"They're crucifying him," said Stephen Bull's mother. "Steve is being put through so much and it's all so terrible."

Abruptly she stopped talking. Finally:

"Frankly, I don't know why I'm even talking to you. Stephen is — oh he's so kind and he has such integrity — so much integrity."

Stephen Bull's mother says she has a lot of stories to tell about her son's integrity.

"But I won't tell them to you. You'll turn it into something awful. The press is crucifying my son."

"Okay," says Stephen Bull with a scarcely perceptible shrug. "What did my mother tell you?"

A wry smile plays around his lips as he listens to the response.

"Well you know," says Bull as he dives into the creamed lima beans, "my mother's worried. It's only natural."

Margaret Mason, Stephen Bull's mother, had her worries ignited in November. In that month it was discovered that a certain tape turned over to Judge John Sirica contained a gap 18½ minutes long.

It was a very consequential tape, containing as it did a conversation between President Nixon and H. R. (Bob) Haldeman that took place three days after the Watergate break-in.

And it became even more consequential last month when a panel of experts reported that the gap in this tape had been caused by at least five erasures. According to Bull's courtroom testimony, White House counsel Fred Buzhardt and

Deputy Presidential Assistant John C. Bennett were among those who had access to that tape. Beyond that there were three others who had access to the tape. One was Rose Mary Woods, the President's personal secretary, who admitted having accidentally erased only five minutes. One was the President, himself.

And one was Stephen B. Bull, a 32-year-old special assistant to the President.

This is why his mother is worried.

In the living room of his Bethesda home, Bull lights a Marlboro. "See, my mother is worried because I'm going before a grand jury. No mother would be happy about that. And she's real — well she's real old-line Garden City (Long Island). You know what that means?"

According to Anne Bull, his wife, old-line Garden City is conservative and middle class.

"Well anyway," Bull continues, attacking the left-over lamb drowning in tomato sauce, "anyway, she can't get used to the idea that anything could go wrong in a conservative, Republican administration. Especially one where her own son works."

Anne Bull smiles a grim smile. Then she says, "The noose tightens."

"Yeah," says her husband. "The noose tightens.' Every night my mother turns on the set and some network news guy is saying, 'The field is narrowing down to three people. The noose tightens.'"

Stephen Bull says he didn't do it. "They're impeaching my inte-

See BULL, F3, Col. 2



By Bob Burchette—The Washington Post

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United Press International

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BULL, From F1

grity," he says, pouring a cocktail into a little glass with elephants prancing all around it. The reporter's glass bears Richard Nixon's signature and the words "Air Force One."

Bull lights another Marlboro, crosses his legs, "I have not erased any tapes. Why, I didn't even hear the portion of the tape that was said to have been erased."

Said to have been erased?

"Well, since I never heard it, I don't know if it was erased or not." He goes on to explain the circumstances surrounding the subpoenaing of the tape, but for the first — and last — time that evening his words grow fuzzy. Bull shakes his head.

"If my words come out sounding like cotton wool, it's because I smoked more than two packs of cigarettes today."

Stephen Bull doesn't think Rose Mary Woods did it.

"No, no. I know Rose and when she says she accidentally erased only five minutes, I believe it."

"Stephen," says one pal who remembers when he scarcely smoked at all, "Stephen must be so terribly distressed these days. Because he knows that if the sinister force didn't do it, then someone he likes very much must have had that tape erased."

Stephen Bull doesn't think Richard Nixon did it, either.

"I have no theories. But why doesn't someone start thinking of the Secret Service. I mean," he amends, "I'm not saying they did it. I don't know. But why not them?"

Stephen Bull sees the President "10 to 20 times a day" and he likes him very much. Stephen Bull has liked Richard Nixon ever since his vice presidential days. Richard Nixon was the first politician Bull ever worked for, and in the late summer of '67 he took leave of absence from his job to work on the campaign for no pay at all. Stephen Bull says he likes Richard Nixon because their political philosophies mesh, but there's probably more to it than that.

"It's the American Dream," says a friend. "Richard Nixon symbolizes the American Dream to Steve. Nixon was born poor and made it. And Steve — well he wasn't born poor, but he wasn't rich, either."

When Bull was 13, his father died of a heart attack.

"And you don't know," says his mother. "You can't possibly know what it was like for that young boy to lose a father."

Asked if her son were very intelligent, she replies:

"No. Not really. Steve was always an average student."

Stephen Bull bursts out laughing. "Oh, no. Oh no, I'm not going to tell you the grades I got in (New York's St. Lawrence) college." He leans forward in the yellow armchair. "Wanna be a

good investigative reporter? Well investigate my college grades." Bull chuckles again, patently pleased with himself. "A gentleman's C. That's what I got in that pillar of academic excellence."

While he was in college, Bull owned a dog of indeterminate parentage named Grendel (the owner was an English major) and Bull insists that the dog went to more classes than her owner. "Grendel could differentiate between days," says Bull. "And she would always go to the correct class and if I wasn't there, she'd take my seat."

On the day Stephen Bull met his future wife, they went to the student union where she beat him royally at a bowling match. He pinned her with his Alpha Tau Omega pin, and by the end of her sophomore year they were married in a Methodist Church in her home town, not far from Syracuse, N.Y.

Anne Bull smiles. "I always said I'd marry a Texas millionaire. A rich Texas millionaire, that's what I used to say."

Instead she married a second lieutenant in the Marines. And dropped out of college.

In many ways, they are the most ordinary couple. They are pretty people — she with her darkening blond hair and pleasant blue eyes; he with the dark even features and the razor haircut that have typified so many of Nixon's young men. The Bulls believe in this country and its intrinsic greatness, and when Stephen Bull was called upon to go to Danang in 1965, Mrs. Bull was very proud of him. As for her husband — he says he never even thought of not going.

He says: "The sacrifices this country made to maintain freedom in other parts of the world meant a great deal to me."

But he also says: "It was a miserable war. I say this because all wars are miserable."

"Yes," says Mrs. Bull setting herself on the couch, "we had a friend who went (to Vietnam) and his wife was against the war, and I felt so sorry for her. But I was lucky. I believed in what we were doing."

They both voted for Goldwater in 1964. "And I was such a typical dumb blonde I thought he had a chance of winning." Anne Bull laughs. "But that's because I was then living in Orange County, (Calif.)."

Steve Bull says he wasn't afraid of dying in Vietnam. "There's an escape mechanism in the mind." Pause. "I tried not to think about it."

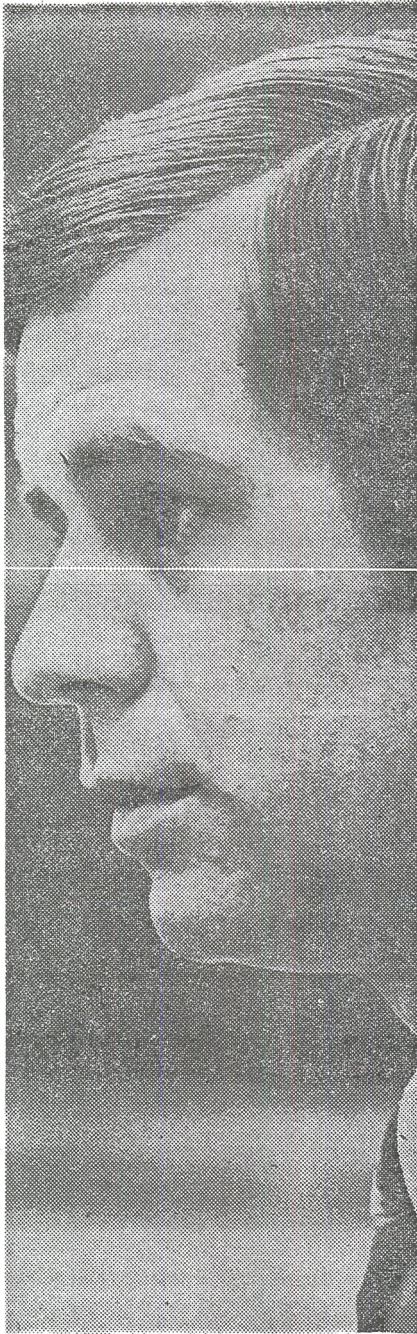
"So did I," says Anne Bull. At the time Bull left for Danang, they had a 1-year-old daughter. And Mrs. Bull was pregnant with their second.

It was the second child, 8-year-old Linnea ("Well," says Anne Bull, "When you have a crazy last name, you need a crazy first one") who bounced down the steps, trailing a Charlie McCarthy doll behind her. Her older sister had just tried — in vain —



Photos by Bob Burchette—The Washington Post

"Steve Bull," says one detractor, "is Nixon's boy. When Nixon snaps his fingers, Bull comes running. Nixon never treats him like he has much respect for him."



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to pull down Charlie McCarthy's pants, and Linnea wasn't pleased.

And neither was Linnea's mother. "Go back to bed, dear," she said. Linnea obeyed reluctantly.

"Frankly," said her mother, "I think she wanted to be interviewed. We've been explaining Watergate to our kids ever since it started, and they're very astute. Of course other kids ask them, 'Did your Daddy do it?' But I tell them it's just like the ugly rumors they hear around school. Hard to disprove.

"Of course," she continues, "in a way

it's simply marvelous for them: Their father's on TV and they're really living history."

But the kids have a decidedly different perspective from their 30-year-old mother:

"Me? Well I can hardly believe it's real. I mean I stay at home, while Steve testifies. Sometimes," sighs Mrs. Bull, "sometimes I have to touch Steve to know it's all real and that he really and truly sees the President every day."

She rises to fix her husband's dinner and unscrew the cap on the Gallo burgundy.

Steve Bull began his career by working for Canada Dry where he promoted such beverages as Wink and the ill-fated Sport Cola. By the time he left to work as an advance man on Richard Nixon's '68 campaign, he was assistant to the then-President, David J. Mahoney. Until recently Mahoney headed the Bi-Centennial.

It was Bob Haldeman who asked Bull to stay on after the campaign was over. At the time, the eager young man of 26 didn't know Haldeman, but he was "exhilarated," and grew to admire his boss enormously. Bull describes Haldeman as "a brilliant man who got to the root of problems with ease," but he adds that he didn't see him socially and hasn't spoken with Haldeman since July:

"I keep my distance from my bosses—and Haldeman was the boss." Bull mulls over that awhile. "It's probably related to my military career where different ranks don't socialize."

"The chain of command," explains Anne Bull.

"Well nobody's pal-ly with Haldeman," says one old associate, "But I think you could say Haldeman and Bull had a kind of father-son relationship. Now Nixon and Bull had a kind of God-person relationship."

Bull was rapidly promoted—in part because he was a Haldeman favorite, in part because so many left. He took over Dwight Chapin's duties, then some of Alexander Butterfield's as well. Butterfield's duties included supervision of the White House tapes. On June 4, while Richard Nixon listened to hours of tape, it was Bull who helped him locate conversations.

The press calls Bull Richard Nixon's appointment secretary. Bull says this isn't entirely accurate, although he does watch over Richard Nixon's appointments. The question "What are you?" elicits the answer, "Whatever you want me to be." And a smile.

"In the early days," says the former associate, "Nixon never could quite get Steve Bull's name straight. He'd refer to him as 'Mr. Uh, Mr. Uh—uh my assistant . . ."

Bull finds the President to be a "warm individual, an individual who knows what he can and cannot delegate."

Steve Bull thinks Richard Nixon will go down in history as one of our greatest Presidents.

"Steve Bull," says one detractor, "is

Nixon's boy. When Nixon snaps his fingers Bull comes running. Nixon never treats him like he has much respect for him."

"Well," says Peter Malatesta, a former Agnew aide and a friend of Bull, "they used to say the same thing about me and Agnew. You take that with a grain of salt."

Bull just shrugs. "There are worse things you can say about a man," he says.

But one source is reported to have said that White House officials tried to pin the gap on the loyal Bull.

Bull snorts at the suggestion. "I'll tell you what I told the first reporter who asked that. It's a lot of bullshit." He chuckles. "And you may quote me."

"Eat your greens, dear," says Anne Bull, indicating a salad upon which a pink sauce is ladled.

Steve Bull digs in. "All of you," he mutters, "all of you must take nagging courses in high school."

Steve Bull says—laughingly—that he will support Bobby Riggs in '76 because he's "the greatest put-on artist around."

Anne Bull says she would like to "do something" with her life ("except I'm such a bumblebrain.") With an eye to the future, she now is finishing school at the University of Maryland.

Her husband does not know what he will do with his life if Richard Nixon is impeached:

"It won't happen. I never allow myself to think about that, but it won't happen."

When he was in college and vice president of Alpha Tau Omega, Steve Bull disapproved of his fraternity's clause that once indicated only white males who accepted the Christian faith need apply.

"There were no blacks on our campus then. But there were Jews. So we decided to interpret 'accepting the Christian faith' as accepting the *existence* of Christianity." Bull lights another Marlboro. "So that's how we got Jews in."

Steve Bull says he can't stand racism, and he feels that the term "Berlin Wall" (as applied to Haldeman, Ehrlichman, et. al.) falls into precisely that category.

"Steve Bull," says a friend, "is very ethical and very fair. And if I had to pick an aide it would be Steve. Steve is loyal and self-effacing. Maybe the best way to describe him is to say he once was a Marine. But a Marine who thinks."

So it must all seem very strange right now for Steve Bull. It must be odd for the man nobody knew much about or cared much about to suddenly be the object of public scrutiny the moment he steps out and attends, say a Peter Malatesta party.

"It'll all be over soon," says Bull.

"It'll all be over soon," echoes Mrs. Bull. And she nods her head, brightly.

Stephen Bull follows the reporter to the door. "You'll find," he says, "as you review your notes, that 18½ minutes are missing."