

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with

THOMAS S. BUTLER

Quartermaster and Aerial Navigator, Navy, Career (World War II and Korean War)

2002

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**Butler, Thomas S.**, (1921-2003). Oral History Interview, 2002.

User copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 45 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract:**

Thomas S. Butler, an Oneida, Tennessee native, discusses his career service in the Navy, including service aboard the *USS Tennessee*, the attack on Pearl Harbor, service aboard a minesweeper during World War II, work as an aerial navigator, service in the Korean War, and his retirement from the Navy. He discusses the death of his father when he was a teenager and, in 1938, enlisting in the Navy so he would not be a financial burden on his family. He recalls his starting salary was twenty-one dollars a month. After basic training in Norfolk (Virginia), he describes his assignment to the battleship *USS Tennessee* (BB-43) in Seattle (Washington). Butler discusses his first voyage on the *Tennessee*, passing through the Panama Canal, maneuvers in preparation for the 1939 New York World's Fair, and docking at both the New York and 1939 San Francisco World's Fairs. He describes duty as a deckhand in the 4<sup>th</sup> Division: manning the number four gun turret and handling powder bags inside the turret. Working out of Pearl Harbor (Hawaii), he discusses anchoring points, having liberty in Hawaii, and transferring to the Navigation Division as a quartermaster. He states there were usually only two battleships anchored in Pearl Harbor at a time. Butler details what he was doing the morning of Sunday December 7, 1941. Asleep on the bridge of the ship, he describes waking up to the sound of explosions and thinking that one of the planes taking off from Ford Island had crashed. The *Tennessee* had been anchored alongside Ford Island at the time, and he describes the placement of the ships around them, including the *USS West Virginia*, *USS Maryland*, *USS Oklahoma*, *USS California*, *USS Arizona*, and the *USS Vestal*. Butler remembers seeing a flight of planes approaching, watching a torpedo strike the *West Virginia*, and witnessing a sailor, who had been on the bow of the *West Virginia* in order to hoist the Union Jack, get blown into the air from the force of the torpedo's strike. He reports seeing two torpedoes hit the *Oklahoma*. He describes recognizing the rising suns on the side of the Japanese planes and being so close that he could see one of the pilots laughing. Butler expresses regret that he did not sound the general quarters alarm. Butler recalls the center gun being hit by a bomb and getting shrapnel wounds. Butler speaks of being assigned to the after steering station because he'd had training in the emergency steering location. He remembers the armored steel hatch above him closing and being locked into the after-steering station for four hours with two other men. Butler discusses losing communication with the rest of the ship, the presence of water seeping down the armored hatch, and the extreme heat coming from the sides of the ship. He recalls not knowing if the ship had sunk or not. Upon being released from the armored hatch, Butler discovered the water leaking in was from fire hoses attempting to put out a fire spread by the burning *USS Arizona*. Butler

recalls being ordered by the chief quartermaster to assume quartermaster-of-the-watch and record the events in the quartermaster's notebook. He addresses recording the location of ships around them and their damage at the time, including the *California*, which was on fire, the *Oklahoma*, which was turned over, and the *West Virginia*, which was sunk. He recalls his ship tying ropes on the *West Virginia* so that it sank straight down and getting wedged against the concrete keys. After the attack, Butler remembers having high security on the ship and tying a white bandana on his arm so that sentries wouldn't startle and shoot him while he was on watch. He reports not being able to contact home except with post-cards on which you could check off a box if you were in the hospital, not injured, etc. Butler talks about the *Tennessee* being towed out of Pearl Harbor, replenishing supplies, and going to Bremerton (Washington) for repairs and upgrades. Butler reports being transferred onto a minesweeper, the YMS-114, in June of 1942. He mentions getting married and shipping out on his wedding night. On the minesweeper, Butler talks about adjusting to a smaller ship, training officers who hadn't been out to sea before, receiving a direct commission, using a paravane to sweep for mines, and being bored. He recalls seeing his wife on liberty whenever he docked at Long Beach (California). In 1945, Butler reports going to Alaska aboard the minesweeper YMS-144, turning the minesweeper over to the Russians, and requesting to go to Aerial Navigation School. Butler touches on being assigned to a destroyer in Long Beach (California) and then being sent to Aerial Navigation School in Clinton (Oklahoma). After Navigation School he was assigned to a B-17 in Willow Grove (Pennsylvania). He remembers flying in and out of hurricanes and typhoons with Airborne Early Warning Development Squadron Four (VX-4) and being based in various locations: the East Coast, Miramar Naval Air Station on the West coast, and Guam. He states that in some storms his plane would be going backwards. He recalls the food on the planes being terrible and convincing a commandant to allow them steak and eggs. He speaks of returning to surface ships during the Korean War and transporting troops aboard the *USS Noble* (APA-218). Butler lists duty aboard the *Noble* as Command Information Center officer and as navigator, and aboard the *USS Paul Revere* as operations officer. After returning from Korea, Butler was assigned to top secret duty with Beach Jumper Unit One, where he served as an executive officer. He discusses rigging 65-foot aviation crash boats with surveillance and jamming equipment and experimenting with radar reflectors attached to box kites. He details successfully running a special operation out of Japan with the commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Fleet, and Butler tells of hiding a destroyer in a storm and surprising his captain by never getting seasick. In October of 1959, Butler recalls being assigned to Dubuque (Iowa) as the commanding officer of the Reserve training center. He touches on assignment to the *USNS General Simon B. Buckner* (T-AP-123), where he was a military commander, and transporting troops and dependents between New York and Bremerhaven (Germany) in the Military Sea Transportation Service. Butler speaks of retiring from the Navy after 27 years, taking his wife and kids to Germany aboard the *Buckner*, and working at the St. Regis Paper Company in Dubuque (Iowa). He tells of being prompted by Admiral Sheehy to start Dubuque's Navy League chapter in order to justify having the Blue Angels in town for flight demonstrations. He touches on *USNS Tennessee* reunions and portrays a chief turret captain who served from the *Tennessee*'s commission in 1919 until it was decommissioned in 1946.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Butler (1921-2003) served in the Navy for twenty-seven years, starting in 1938. He was stationed aboard the *USS Tennessee* in Hawaii during the attack on Pearl Harbor, served aboard minesweepers during World War II, logged 2,000 hours of aerial navigation work, served on the *USS Noble* during the Korean War, and commanded units such as the Beach Jumper Unit One, the Reserve training center in Dubuque (Iowa), and the *USNS Buckner*. After retirement from the Navy, he worked at the St. Regis Paper Company in Dubuque for eighteen years.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Archivist, 2002.  
Transcribed by Michael L. Weber, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2006.  
Transcript edited by Jackie Mulhern, 2007.  
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2010.

**Interview Transcript:**

Jim: We're talking to Tom Butler. The date is 21, is it the 21<sup>st</sup> today, March?

Butler: Ah, the 21<sup>st</sup>, I think.

Jim: Yeah, the 21<sup>st</sup> of March, 2002. Where were you born, sir?

Butler: I was born on the [unintelligible], Oneida, O-N-E-I-D-A, Tennessee. That's up on the Kentucky-Tennessee border.

Jim: Okay. And when did you go in the service?

Butler: I went in the service in July of 1938.

Jim: And what was the circumstance that you did that?

Butler: Well, the circumstances were that my mother ah, my father died two years before that. My mother was single and she had four children she was trying to raise. And ah, she was raising [unintelligible] on a great salary of \$12.50 per week and raising four children. I decided I, being the oldest boy – I had a sister older than I am, but the oldest boy, that I would get out of there and relieve her of part of that burden. So, I went into the Navy. I went into the Navy as an Apprentice Seaman and during those days, it was \$21 a month.

Jim: Where did you get your basic?

Butler: I got the basic training at Norfolk, Virginia and from Norfolk I went around down through the Panama Canal and up to –

Jim: You went onboard ship right away?

Butler: Well, when I left boot camp, I went aboard ship, yes, just for transportation, not as an assignment.

Jim: When did they develop the specialties, the skill areas? You went to some school.

Butler: Oh, I went to a number of schools, but ah, I didn't –

Jim: Where'd you go first?

Butler: But that was later ah, well –

Jim: I'm sorry. After you went to boot camp, they sent you someplace –

Butler: No. I did not go in any school. I went directly to the ship.

Jim: As an able seaman?

Butler: As an apprentice seaman.

Jim: Yeah, well –

Butler: Yes, as an apprentice seaman. I'm not –

Jim: And what ship did you go to?

Butler: Well, I went aboard the *USS Tennessee* in Seattle. However I was –

Jim: That was a big ship.

Butler: However, I was aboard a number of ships before that, albeit for transportation only.

Jim: Oh, I see. But, your first full –

Butler: My first permanent assignment was the battleship *Tennessee*.

Jim: I see, what was the hull number?

Butler: BB-43. Baker, Baker, 43, was her hull number, yes.

Jim: BB-43. You always have to have hull numbers.

Butler: A 32,000-tonner.

Jim: Right. I know the class, okay? So –

Butler: So, I – I joined –

Jim: [Unintelligible] joined from Tennessee well, that was a real experience.

Butler: Yes, it was [laughs].

Jim: Was it a surprise?

Butler: No, it wasn't really, as we were going on the transport *Henderson* from Norfolk to the West Coast. And the *Henderson* was going on from there to China. They had a list of ships' openings and the number of personnel that you could request assignment to these various ships, or the China duty.

And I saw the *Tennessee* on the board there and I did not know one ship from another. So, I selected the *Tennessee* as my permanent station.

Jim: Duty in 1938 to '39 was pretty good duty?

Butler: Ah, it ah –

Jim: Other than the fact that they didn't pay you much.

Butler: Well, it depends on what duty you were trained at. In 1938, when I joined the *Tennessee* at Seattle, we left Seattle and come around to the New York World's Fair in 1939.

Jim: Through the Panama Canal?

Butler: Through the Panama Canal.

Jim: Wow, as a young boy, you really had some, [unintelligible] –

Butler: And then we went back from New York City; back to San Francisco through the Panama Canal. So, the first nine months I was in the Navy, I went through the Panama Canal three times.

Jim: Oh, my goodness.

Butler: And I haven't been back through the canal since then.

Jim: It probably hasn't changed much.

Butler: No. It hasn't. I was down there during my tour of duty with the Military Transport Service. I was down to Panama City, took troops down. And it hadn't changed any.

Jim: So aboard ship, you were just an able seaman [unintelligible]?

Butler: Ah, when I was aboard ship ah, originally I was a deckhand in what they call the 4<sup>th</sup> Division. The 4<sup>th</sup> Division was ah, seaman ah, had in charge port side of the quarter deck—the afterdeck. And also, we manned the No. 4 gun turret: 14-inch guns we had at that time, and the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, that was their battle station. It was –

Jim: And your duty at that gun?

Butler: Well, my duty at that gun was handling powder –

Jim: Powder?

- Butler: Yes, and loading the – I was in the turret, the gun turret itself.
- Jim: The turret.
- Butler: Inside the turret, yes. Not down in the powder handling room, but up inside the turret. And I was pushing the powder bags from the hoist over to the –
- Jim: Did they use earplugs?
- Butler: Yeah.
- Jim: When you were firing?
- Butler: No. We never did. It wasn't much of a noise in there.
- Jim: Oh, there really wasn't. So, you didn't lose your hearing.
- Butler: Didn't lose your hearing at all in there.
- Jim: A lot of guys did who were on big ships.
- Butler: No, because we ah – No, we'd fire Battle Practice, fired – Every year you would fire for efficiency. And that's the only time you really, you fired the guns. The rest of the times were dry runs.
- Jim: Where did the *Tennessee* go before it ended up at Pearl Harbor?
- Butler: Well, New York, then back to San Francisco and then back to Seattle.
- Jim: It was originally then, part of the Atlantic Fleet, right?
- Butler: No. It was always in the Pacific Fleet. See, during 1939, the World's Fair in the Spring of 1939, they brought all the major ships from the West Coast. They started them around for the New York – be there for a presentation at the World's Fair. However, they got a war scare, so the ships turned back after maneuvers – We had maneuvers down at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and a landing force there, a Navy landing force, went on maneuvers there. Once we had the maneuvers there then we were due to go into New York. However, the war scare-- they sent all the ships back except two of us, the *Tennessee* and I think the other one was the *Pennsylvania*—two battleships. We went on to New York for the World's Fair to represent the Navy there.
- Jim: What did you do?



- Butler: Well, I was a mess cook at that time.
- Jim: You were – you had to have people come aboard then you showed off the ship? Is that –
- Butler: No. A mess cook is the waiter. I had to –
- Jim: But, I mean, you said you went to the World's Fair as if the ship had some responsibilities.
- Butler: The ship was there just showing the colors. We tied up at the foot of 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, I believe it was, the dock up there and we had visitors come aboard the ship, yes. So a –
- Jim: So, were you enjoying yourself?
- Butler: Yes, I did. I enjoyed –
- Jim: It was a lot different from the hills of Tennessee.
- Butler: [Laughs]. It was quite a bit different. I mean, the whole Navy was quite different from the hills of Tennessee.
- Jim: It was quite a shock for you, wasn't it?
- Butler: It was a shock. It was a shock and –
- Jim: There wasn't any time that you felt that you'd made a mistake?
- Butler: No, not at all, or else I wouldn't have stayed in as long as I did if I had thought I made a mistake.
- Jim: Well, I don't know. When you first start out, you –
- Butler: When you first started out you're a little bit apprehensive because, during those days, your petty officer is your senior enlisted man. They were almighty God to the people like myself, an apprentice. When they said, "Jump," you –
- Jim: Jumped.
- Butler: Theoretically, you jumped and didn't even ask, "How high?"
- Jim: They fed you regularly and then they give you some money and you –

- Butler: You got three meals a day and you got a –
- Jim: And times were tough at home, so –
- Butler: Yes, they were tough at home, so in fact, I sent money home, out of \$21 a month.
- Jim: You sent mom some money?
- Butler: I sent her \$5 or \$7, I believe it was, and I sent her –
- Jim: You were a good, dutiful son.
- Butler: I made it out of my allotment; it went to her automatically.
- Jim: Oh, you signed up to do that?
- Butler: Out of my allotment, yes, out of my pay. They took it out of my pay and sent it directly to her.
- Jim: I see. Okay, where did you end up, after you left the New York area, then where?
- Butler: Well, we left New York and we went right back around to San Francisco, down through the Panama Canal up to San Francisco and San Francisco also had a World's Fair in 1939. So we went up there for that World's Fair, again, in the harbor, a show of strength there with the different Navy forces although, at San Francisco we had more – I don't recall how many, but they had more of the battleships there than the two of them. We had San Francisco then after – I was going to say, probably a month, or six weeks, in San Francisco. Then we went back up to Seattle Navy Yard at Bremerton. Then from Bremerton, then we went from there, went out to Hawaii.
- Jim: Was that early 1940?
- Butler: Yes, about early 1940, because we worked out of Pearl Harbor. And the time when we first went in there with the battleships, the harbor was not bridged. You could not go all the way around Ford Island. You could only go up the eastern channel there. You had to go up and then they'd have to swing the battleships around and head them back at sea inside the harbor. And later, I don't know when they dredged the harbor out, it must have been somewhere around early 1940 or late 1940. Because, by the time of Pearl Harbor, you could go all the way around –
- Jim: How did you enjoy your stay at Honolulu?

- Butler: Well, Honolulu—we enjoyed it because we got what time we were there. However, most of the ships, even at that time there was a slight war scare going on. So most of the battleships we anchored down at Lahaina Roads, down off the Island of Mahauai, or Maui, between Maui and Lahaina and the roads there, the channels between the two, which in the Navy, they called the roads. We anchored down there and then there'd just be two battleships in Pearl Harbor at a time. The rest of them, you would go out and perform exercises and battle drills all during the week. Then Friday night, you'd go into either Lahaina Roads, or if it was your turn, you'd go into Pearl Harbor and anchor in there. Then, you could go into Honolulu for liberty. You did get a limited amount of liberty down at Lahaina Roads, although the City of Lahaina was so small that they would only –
- Jim: You couldn't get in too much trouble there.
- Butler: No, you couldn't. There were an awful lot of sailors and nothing to do there. So, that's the reason I was quite surprised, at the time of Pearl Harbor, that there were that many battleships in the harbor at one time.
- Jim: It was unusual, right.
- Butler: During the 18 months, we never had that many ships in there.
- Jim: You were there at Pearl Harbor then from that moment on until the attack? Is that correct?
- Butler: Well, I was in and out of Pearl Harbor. We were in Pearl Harbor at the time of the attack, yes.
- Jim: But you were theoretically based there?
- Butler: Based there, yes.
- Jim: Alright, I get it.
- Butler: Well, our homeport was still Long Beach, California.
- Jim: Oh, I see.
- Butler: But we were operating out of Pearl Harbor for probably 18 months before Pearl Harbor. But, our home base was still, at that time, Long Beach. Now there are a couple of reasons for that because, if your home base in the Navy is, you're entitled to bring your family to your home base. But, you're not – when you're on duty, assigned like in Honolulu, you couldn't bring your family out there, because I mean, those who were married. So

therefore, I mean, we were working out of Honolulu, or out of Pearl Harbor, but not based there.

Jim: Did you write your mom regularly?

Butler: Oh yes, I wrote her, I guess regularly, probably once a month. Or, I know ah, one of the comments I saw in the newspaper there at the time of, right after Pearl Harbor, the local newspaper, the Knoxville News Sentinel, printed a letter from my mother. And, she said that I had been talking about being bored and tiresome there and in Pearl Harbor and looking forward to, we were scheduled to go down to Australia and looking forward to that. But, Pearl Harbor came up before then and we never got to Australia.

Jim: So, tell me about that Sunday morning.

Butler: Well, that Sunday morning, I was asleep on the bridge of the ship. See, we had no air conditioning during those days and I was – Now, in the meanwhile, I had transferred from the 4<sup>th</sup> Division to the ‘N’ Division, Navigation. So now I was a quartermaster. And quartermasters in the Navy are the navigators, the navigation. So I was a quartermaster. At the time of Pearl Harbor I was a 3<sup>rd</sup> class quartermaster. And, when we were in port, like at Pearl Harbor, since we had no air conditioning on the ship, and the bridge of the ship was our cleaning station, and our working space, then we slept -- most all of us bought these small, folding, canvas cots called Army cots during those, at that time and we’d sleep out on the bridge of the ship up there.

Jim: It was more comfortable.

Butler: It was much more comfortable, cooler. And, like on a Sunday morning, you weren’t bothered by the master-at-arms. Or, reveille didn’t bother you up there because nobody ever came up there. And ah, you could sleep all morning if you wanted. So at Pearl Harbor, when it started, I was actually asleep and on the bridge of the ship when I heard the noise and the explosions.

Jim: What did you think about that?

Butler: Well, I thought one of our planes had crashed. That’s what I thought, because of planes taking on and off the Ford ah, Ford Island there all the time.

Jim: Were you tied up at Ford Island?

Butler: We were tied up at keys alongside of Ford Island, yes.

- Jim: Who was on the outside of you?
- Butler: Outside of us was the *West Virginia*.
- Jim: Right.
- Butler: And the ship in front of us, directly in front of us, was the *Maryland*. Outboard of the *Maryland* was the *Oklahoma*. And then on up, a little further up the harbor, was the *California*. Right directly astern of us was the *Arizona*. Sixty feet astern of us was the *Arizona* and alongside her was the *Vestal*, I believe it was; one of the repair ships there, which got underway during the battle and got out in the clear.
- Jim: So, you were awakened and then –
- Butler: So, I was awakened by the sound of the explosions and I thought it had been one of our planes that probably had taken off and crashed into the island. So, I got up, put my short, white trousers on and went out to the front of the bridge of the ship to look and see what was going on. And, I could see smoke and flames over on Ford Island and still thinking it was probably one of our planes. And then I heard some planes approaching from our port side, from our left, coming in and I looked over there and this was a flight of Japanese planes.
- Jim: Did you know that?
- Butler: I didn't know it until they got up to the ships up there where I could see them.
- Jim: Could you see the red sun?
- Butler: I saw one of them dip his wing and drop a torpedo and I'd always heard, you know, you could see a torpedo coming through the water. It's a sting torpedo during those days so I sat there fascinated and watched this torpedo come through the water and hit the *West Virginia* alongside of us. And, there was a sailor there, going up to hoist the colors, hoist the Union Jack really. See, in the Navy, the Union Jack is flown at the bow and the Ensign at the stern. So, you know that well, one of the quartermasters on the *West Virginia* was going up to the bow of the ship to hoist the Union Jack. The torpedo hit alongside of him and blew him up in the air and I don't know what happened to him, to this day. And I saw, from that same flight of planes, two torpedoes I saw hit the *Oklahoma* up ahead of us.
- Jim: Were you confused at this, I mean, or had there been talk of any kind of a war?

- Butler: There had been no talk of any type of war, to my knowledge.
- Jim: It's hard to get this through your head what –
- Butler: It's hard to get through your head except when you sit and you see them dropping torpedoes and then I saw these planes come over close enough that I could see the pilot inside of it. I could see him, he had his canopy pulled back and he was sitting there laughing.
- Jim: So you knew that incident was the Japanese?
- Butler: They were in that incident because you could see those orange rising suns on the plane. I didn't see the wings of it. I saw it on the body of the plane. And ah, I saw that and –
- Jim: What was your duty?
- Butler: Well, I was a quartermaster. My duty assignment at that time was in central steering station, which was right down in the center section of the ship. So I left the bridge of the ship.
- Jim: Did 'general quarters' sound right away?
- Butler: No. It did not and I regret it to this day. There was a 'general quarters' alarm on the bridge and I could have pulled and sounded it a little quicker. But, I left the bridge and went on down to the central station where my battle station was. And ah, the first lieutenant was there, the assistant navigator was there, the fire control, the damage control officer and then the quartermaster and the phone talkers, of course, talking to different parts of the ship.
- Jim: Was there any way you could have gotten underway?
- Butler: No. We found out later it –
- Jim: Or, were you too tied in?
- Butler: Well, I went back – The assistant navigator had me go back to 'steering aft', after steering station, because there was nobody back there and that was their final, emergency steering location where we had batteries and the compressed air, as well as the man-powered, big wheels that you could turn by manpower. And ah, nobody – I had been trained in those. I had stood watches at each of those, so the assistant navigator sent me back there to be the quartermaster that manned that station, as the quartermaster

was not there. And consequently I – By this time, the general alarm had sounded and our watertight doors were all closed. So, --

Jim: But you hadn't been hit.

Butler: No, we hadn't been – Yes, we were. We had been hit. Our center gun, the No. 2 turret, was hit oh, as I was leaving the bridge. Right before I left the bridge, we had a bomb hit our center gun.

Jim: It was dropped from a flying plane?

Butler: Yes, dropped from one of the planes. It dropped it and it hit our No. 2 turret and exploded. I had shrapnel. Later, when I went up there, the shrapnel had gone through the place I had been standing just a few seconds before.

Jim: Wonderful.

Butler: And I'd seen the *Oklahoma* starting to turn over. She was starting to list within the first five minutes. She started to list to port. I had seen a torpedo hit the *West Virginia*. I'd seen the pilots and the planes. I knew we were at war. At any rate, I went back to the after steering station. And, going back there, they had to have all the watertight doors go from one compartment and then the damage control man would notify next compartment to open. They were opening one of the doors to let me get through and I – It took me probably 20 minutes to get to the after steering station, because they were opening and closing those watertight hatches. And then, I got to the after steering station and I had a vertical hatch there which – an armored hatch that I had to go down through in order to get down to the after steering station itself. When I got down there, they closed the armored, steel hatch above us and dogged it down. So, there was no way I could get out of there, or the two other men who were down there at the time also; an electrician and a machinist mate. That was their battle station, also. So, they were down there and there was no way that we could get out of there. And, I contacted the bridge over the voice-powered telephones, but they reported another flight of bombers coming in. So apparently, this was the bomb group that came in about 9 o'clock in the morning. The dive-bombers made a run on a ship. And ah, they reported that and after I was telling the other two people wanting to know what was going on, what happened and they had not been up topside. I had seen the Japanese so I told them, you know, we were being attacked by Japanese, that we were at war. Then we lost communications. Nobody had talked to us over the telephones and we didn't know what was going on. So, we were down there, and the water was seeping down by this armored hatch, and the water seeping down around it and the bulkheads. The sides of the ship

were so hot that you couldn't put your hand against them. And so, we didn't know if we were sunk –

Jim: What was that from?

Butler: Well, when we got out of there, shortly after 12-o'clock, some four hours later, we found out that it was from the *Arizona*, directly astern of us and setting on fire. And her oil was on fire and that set the section above us, which happened to be our officers' quarters, set it on fire. And, attempting to put the fires out, the fire hose and such was leaking the water down on us. But, we didn't know it. We didn't know if we were sitting on the bottom.

Jim: It was really the fire hoses that put the water on you?

Butler: Yeah, we didn't know that it was our own hose, our water, until the fire-control people let us out of there, our damage-control people. And when I went up then, I guess the chief quartermaster got hold of me and said, "You pick up the log and start writing; assume the quartermaster-of-the-watch." And we had a notebook the quartermaster kept rough notes of what all was going on like when you were at sea and the different times you changed course, or change speed. All this was always entered in the quartermaster's notebook. And later on, the officer-of-the-day, or the officer-of-the-deck would take it and write the ship's log out of it. So I assumed the quartermaster-of-the-watch then and started trying to list the various ships that had been sunk. There was the *California* on fire ahead of us, the *Oklahoma* turned over ahead of us, the *Maryland* right in front of us. I couldn't see any damage on her, but the *West Virginia* –

Jim: There were only two ships that got really damaged. They were the *Oklahoma* and the *Arizona*.

Butler: Well, the *West Virginia* was sunk.

Jim: Oh, yeah. The *West Virginia* –

Butler: She sank straight down. The *California* up ahead of us, she sank.

Jim: She sank in the mud, right.

Butler: Yeah, it took the *California* four days, but she burned and she sank up there. The *Pennsylvania*, she was in dry dock. And they sank the dry dock. It was a floating dry dock.

Jim: Oh, I had forgotten that.



- Butler: They sank the dry dock out from her. And the *Shaw* and another destroyer, I don't remember which, was up in front of her; the *Pennsylvania* and two destroyers in that floating dry dock.
- Jim: The *Nevada* is the only ship that really got underway.
- Butler: Yes, *Nevada* is the only one that got underway and then she got four torpedoes into her while she was out in the channel. So, they ran her aground, so that she wouldn't block the channel going out. I don't know. They said it was the chief quartermaster who got her underway. I don't know.
- Jim: It was not one of the major people on the ship.
- Butler: No. It was not. None of the major captains of the ship –
- Jim: Were aboard.
- Butler: Now the captain of the *West Virginia* was because he was killed. He was killed on the bridge there.
- Jim: But he was the exception.
- Butler: By a bomb blast.
- Jim: But most of them were ashore.
- Butler: Most all of them. Our captain, the captain of the *Tennessee*, got back about 10:30 in the morning. So most all of those were – The only two battleships afloat that possibly could have gotten out of there were the *Maryland* and the *Tennessee*. However, when the *Oklahoma* turned over, she wedged the *Maryland* against these concrete keys and when the *West Virginia* sank alongside of us, she wedged us into the concrete keys.
- Jim: I talked to two guys who were on the *Maryland*. And they said that they were so afraid when the *Oklahoma* turned over that it was going to pull them down.
- Butler: Yes.
- Jim: They said everybody turned to, with axes, and tried to cut the ropes to the *Oklahoma* because they thought, sure as hell, it was going to turn them over, too.
- Butler: Well, our group did exactly the opposite. They put more ropes on her to hold her upright, so that the *West Virginia* sank straight down. I mean,

they saw what had happened to the *Oklahoma*. They saw her turned over so they were trying to keep the *West Virginia* straight up. So, they couldn't get us out of there until they blasted these concrete keys out. Concrete keys were just –

Jim: And so, the attack stopped for awhile and they came back later?

Butler: Well, the last attack – they had made some ah, dive bombing attacks sometime around 9- o'clock or 9:15 and that was the last of it.

Jim: That was the end of it then?

Butler: That was the end of it there. We didn't know it, but it turns out, that was the end of it, because we –

Jim: Did you get out from your spot there?

Butler: No. We didn't get out of there. We couldn't. We could not move –

Jim: I mean your spot aboard ship?

Butler: I got out of the after-steering station, yes. I got out of there about noon that day. Then I could see the damage. I could see the *Arizona* aflame behind us and the *Oklahoma* turned upside-down and the *West Virginia* sunk alongside of us. I could see all of that and I entered all of this into the ship's log, I mean the quartermaster's notebook; the various damages that I could see. And, I heard a couple of explosions sometime around 2:30 or 3:00-o'clock in the afternoon on the *California*. And I entered that into the notebook that I had heard the explosions, anyway.

Jim: Was there talk of maybe an invasion?

Butler: Yes, there very definitely was. We were very afraid that day of being invaded from Japan. We stationed the Marines, stationed extra guards around the deck of the ship on the stern and watching every ship –

Jim: Watching for landing parties and –

Butler: Watching for anybody who might come and try to board the ship. And, of course, we had to be careful because, at the same time we were picking up our – we had boat crews out there ah, hauling people who had died, cadavers, back over to the ship, haul them over to put on one of the piers there at Ford Island. But, I remember I had – I don't remember whether it was the 8-12 or I guess 12-4 that night, the midnight watch that night, because I was on the deck and part of my job was, or my duties were, to go around and check these sentries at their different posts. So, I was

saying, "How am I going to keep from getting shot?" So I put a white band, -- took a handkerchief and put a white band around my left arm. So, I'd go up to one of them and I'd notify him. I said, "Now when you see that, that's me coming, not a Japanese. So, don't shoot me." But we were at a high state, expecting the --

Jim: So, when it came time to -- when evening came, the boys gave it up thinking that --

Butler: No, no. All night long, we were watching. The next day, on December 8, in the afternoon of December 8, we had given up and decided that they were not going to invade us then. So, our security slackened off somewhat.

Jim: Did you receive any official word from the authorities as to what had happened elsewhere, or had you heard anything --

Butler: No. Not that I know of now, see. Don't forget I was, I guess, a second class quartermaster.

Jim: So the word didn't get down to that level?

Butler: I wasn't far enough up the ladder to get any of the word, at that time.

Jim: Okay.

Butler: So, we did, the most thing we got was out of the local newspaper, the Honolulu newspaper.

Jim: But you couldn't call or write home.

Butler: No, we could send a postcard. They printed a group of postcards and they had little check-off spots on there where you'd check off that, 'I am not injured,' or 'I'm in the hospital,' or, I'm trying to think. There were about four different places and that's all you could do, was check those spots saying that you were not injured.

Jim: Confirm that you were alive.

Butler: To confirm that you were alive and sign your name to it and send that home. But, during the first week there at least, that's all you could do; the only communications you could have at the moment.

Jim: How long before you could call home?

- Butler: I really don't know. At that time, I couldn't afford to call home. I don't think my mother even had a telephone in the house.
- Jim: Oh, my. I had forgotten that. Yeah. So, when did you get off ship then?
- Butler: I left the *Tennessee* in June of 1942.
- Jim: No, I meant how did you get out of Pearl Harbor?
- Butler: They blasted those keys out and then they had to tow, sneak the *Maryland* ahead of us out from the *Oklahoma*. They pulled her out and then they pulled us out through where the *Maryland* had been, in between the *Oklahoma* and Ford Island. They pulled us out of there.
- Jim: Where'd you go?
- Butler: Well, we went over to the Navy yards there in Pearl just for one day, to replenish our supplies more than anything else.
- Jim: But, you had no trouble getting around then. I mean your ship wasn't that badly damaged?
- Butler: No. We went back to sea. We came back –
- Jim: You said that one gun was injured. That was the only thing –
- Butler: No. We had two bomb hits. We had a bomb hit our No. 2 turret, the center gun there. I mentioned that. It threw shrapnel through the place I was. And then we had a bomb hit on our No. 3 turret and it went through 12-inches of armored steel at the top of the turret, went inside the turret, broke open and burned. It killed six men inside there.
- Jim: Well, that was a direct-hit.
- Butler: Yes, that was a direct-hit.
- Jim: Because otherwise, it wouldn't have gone through.
- Butler: It killed six men inside that turret—six men. We lost another two men by shrapnel, by strafing runs. And so, we had lost a total of eight people, to my knowledge, on the *Tennessee*.
- Jim: All right.
- Butler: Out of 1,200 of the crew.

- Jim: So, where'd you go?
- Butler: We got out of Pearl Harbor on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December. We came back in and went on up to Bremerton to the Navy yards at Bremerton, Washington.
- Jim: For repair?
- Butler: For repair. Well, for repair and to put on a radar, which we did not have radar before, and to put new rifling in our guns. See, the 14-inch guns, or 16-inch, I don't know what ship had those, but 14-inch guns, you'd fire so many rounds in them and then you've got to pull the center section, the rifling out and sweat new rifling in there to run them again. So, we had to have all new rifling put back in all of our turrets.
- Jim: So you were in Washington how long.
- Butler: We were in Bremerton, I would say, probably three months.
- Jim: I would imagine, yes.
- Butler: But, they were working overtime, 24-hours-a-day in order to do it.
- Jim: So, you had leave to go back to Tennessee?
- Butler: No, I didn't go back to Tennessee, uh uh. I didn't, well I'm trying to think when the first time was I went back to Tennessee. I don't remember.
- Jim: I thought that everybody had leave time.
- Butler: No, I don't remember any of it, really. On the ship, we left there on, oh, I left the *Tennessee* in June, so we must have left there in May. We left Pearl Harbor on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December, I know that, and then to Bremerton. We were there at Bremerton and I went on one other cruise. We left Bremerton, or Seattle, to go into Midway Island, supposedly. And then, they had that famous battle at Midway and they turned the ship around and sent the battle group back into San Francisco.
- Jim: You got to Midway during the battle?
- Butler: No, we did not.
- Jim: They turned you back?
- Butler: They turned us back. So, we did not get to Midway. They turned us back and we went into San Francisco and at San Francisco is where I was transferred off the ship and went into mine sweepers from there.

Jim: That was a step down.

Butler: Oh yeah, to go from a 32,000-ton –

Jim: You went from a room to a closet.

Butler: From a battleship to a 146-foot wooden minesweeper.

Jim: Tell me about getting used to that.

Butler: Well, it was the difference between night and day, really.

Jim: I'm sure.

Butler: The only trouble was that I was on the first minesweeper I went onto, -- Myself and a second class boson's mate, were the only two people who had ever been on the ocean.

Jim: Oh my. You were a second class then?

Butler: Yes. So we had –

Jim: I see. You were an old man [laughs].

Butler: Well yeah. I was an 'old salt,' that's for sure.

Jim: Where was their port?

Butler: The homeport of that was San Diego.

Jim: What was the name of that?

Butler: They were YMSs [Yard Minesweepers]. They didn't have a name.

Jim: Oh, they didn't?

Butler: No, they were numbered. The wooden minesweeper YMS-114 and then later, they transferred me over to YMS-144.

Jim: I see that.

Butler: So I was training crews, more or less. I went on their cruise and I was training the officers how to run the ship, because these officers, although they had their basic training and they were college graduates, most of them, and I had just managed to get a high school certificate after I was in

the Navy there. But, I'd been on the bridge of a ship for the past four years.

Jim: So, where did you – what duty did you have on the minesweeper?

Butler: Well, on the minesweeper at first, I was just a quartermaster. I was senior quartermaster on them and I got onto them and made chief quartermaster onboard the minesweeper, yes.

Jim: You made chief? [Unintelligible].

Butler: Well, about every six months at that time, whereas before the war, you had to be a seaman nine months before you could even go up for third class petty officer. But, during the war, they went fast.

Jim: Tell me about your minesweeper.

Butler: The crew is 42 men. That includes three officers. So, it would be 39 enlisted men and three officers.

Jim: And your eating quarters, what did that involve?

Butler: Well, your eating quarters, you had a mess hall on it, which was comparatively –

Jim: About the size of this room?

Butler: About the size of this room, yes. Not this wide, but roughly this long.

Jim: What did you do, feed half the crew at a time?

Butler: Yes. You'd feed the – I don't recall, really. But, I think you could feed all of them, but those who were not on watch.

Jim: Right. And your sleeping quarters?

Butler: Well, they had bunks on there.

Jim: Good. You had a bunk. You didn't have a hammock.

Butler: No. I had a hammock on the battleship when I first went aboard her. You slept in a canvas hammock. But, on the minesweepers, you had built-in bunks there. They were spring bunks which, during the day, you folded them up and lashed them up against the bulkheads.

Jim: How fast did that minesweeper go?

Butler: Ah, top speed would be about 14 knots. That's 16 miles-per-hour.

Jim: Wow.

Butler: Well they weren't built for speed. They were built for power, you see –

Jim: Did you have paravanes?

Butler: Yes, you'd rig paravanes, either on both sides, or one side, depending on how your formation – what you were sweeping at; the paravane and then the depressors to hold the wires down. And, of course, the paravane floats on top in order to maintain the distance on them.

Jim: Was that hard work?

Butler: Well, the work wasn't hard. We'd mine sweep up and down the West Coast there.

Jim: That's what I was going to say. Where were you –

Butler: Well, from Point Arguello, which is above –

Jim: I don't know where that is.

Butler: It's down, about halfway between San Francisco and Los Angeles, above Santa Barbara. We'd sweep in and out of Santa Barbara, Port Hueneme, which was a big Sea Bee port down below, between Los Angeles and Santa Barbara.

Jim: You didn't lay any mines?

Butler: We didn't lay any mines. We never swept up any except for a couple of –

Jim: I was going to say, you never swept up any –

Butler: No, we never swept up any enemy mines. They did sweep up some training mines there, where they laid a group of them. We swept up four of those.

Jim: It sounds like boring duty.

Butler: It was boring duty. It was really boring because, when we first married; I got married in 1943, I was on the minesweeper, I guess the 114 at that time.



- Jim: It says so here, February, '43 until March, '43.
- Butler: But we were assigned anyway. We were assigned and a submarine patrol. We also had sound gear on the ship, just out of San Diego. So, I was married one day and went to sea that night and I could see the apartment I lived in where my wife was over in San Diego. For two weeks, we patrolled back and forth there. There was nothing I could do but look over there and say, "Well, I know she's over there."
- Jim: But, you had a lot of liberty there?
- Butler: You had the liberty then.
- Jim: Sure.
- Butler: Well, we'd make a run up from San Diego. We'd go up – mine sweep off of San Clemente and then we'd go out, usually out to San Clemente Island. We'd go out there and usually sent a couple of men ashore just to scout the island to see if they saw any enemy activity on it. Then we'd go up and sweep the harbor at Long Beach and spend a day overnight at Long Beach and go out of there and sweep up to Port Hueneme. We'd stay overnight at Hueneme and then go up to Santa Barbara and sweep off Santa Barbara. From Santa Barbara, we'd go on up to Point Arguello and turn around there and come back down. So, when we were in port, Santa Barbara or Port Hueneme or Long Beach, then we had liberty in those places. So it was about every other day, we'd get liberty, get into port.
- Jim: Now you said that you got a commission?
- Butler: Yes, I got commissioned on the minesweepers.
- Jim: They just handed that to you?
- Butler: Yes, figuratively that's what it was. I had a captain on one of the minesweepers, on the 144 there who had been to sea since he was 12 years old. He was a very experienced seaman and captain. And, he was a commander. They brought him into the Navy, brought him in as a lieutenant, I guess. And ah, then he took a liking to me because I was interested in navigation and he'd ask me what I was doing. I'd take his star shines or sun shots, or what have you. He'd say, "Let me see your work when you get through." And I'd show him where I thought we were and what my positions and he said, "Well, I'm going to recommend you for a commission."
- Jim: A direct commission?

- Butler: Yes.
- Jim: I've never heard of that.
- Butler: And I said, 'Not until I make permanent chief.' I made chief petty officer there on the ship there and under him. A couple of the officers were supposed to give the exam and, of course, they didn't know anything about navigation so –
- Jim: How could they give you an exam if they didn't know anything?
- Butler: They couldn't give you an exam. They just – so they just gave me the commission, gave me my chief's uniform as soon as I'd made chief. Then, I told –
- Jim: That's a fantastic story.
- Butler: I told the captain, I said, "I don't want to be recommended until I make chief," because I'd seen before the war how hard it was to make chief, see.
- Jim: Right. You always have something to fall back on because a lot of those commissions were dropped, or scaled back.
- Butler: Yes. So I said, "I can always go back to chief," and be chief petty officer, anyway.
- Jim: So you became an ensign?
- Butler: I became an ensign.
- Jim: Now did a lot of other guys do this?
- Butler: There were quite a number of quartermasters who either –
- Jim: They really must have been putting and pushing to get –
- Butler: All the quartermasters I knew, all of them who had gotten that were quartermasters on the battleships at the same time I was. All of them got commissioned as a commissioned officer, or as a warrant officer.
- Jim: Right. The warrant is not so far from chief.
- Butler: Well, no. The warrant officer is between the chief and between the officers. The warrant is the best job in the Navy.
- Jim: Because you can stay out of trouble. Right, I can understand that.

- Butler: Right. The warrant was the best job in the Navy. The only trouble with the warrant was, you could not draw more money than the captain of the ship drew. And, some of these warrants who had 25-26 years in the Navy in longevity, well their pay was actually more than the four-striper on that ship, the captain. But they couldn't draw it until they transferred somewhere else and they'd get paid in one lump sum.
- Jim: You mean that money was held for them?
- Butler: Yes. The money was held for them.
- Jim: I didn't know that.
- Butler: They were given the pay. I mean, they were entitled to it, but they couldn't draw it while they were on the ship because they couldn't draw more money than he did, than the captain was getting. So, when they were transferred off the ship, they were given this back-pay all in a lump sum. So, I got a direct-commission and stayed on the same minesweeper. I went aboard it as a first class quartermaster, I made chief and as soon as I made chief the captain put in the papers to recommend me for a commission and six months later, I was a commissioned officer. And he also requested that I stay aboard ship as his third officer.
- Jim: Did the food get better?
- Butler: No, it was still the same food, still the same sleeping quarters, although I had a permanent bunk instead of a fold-down bunk. When I made chief, I had a permanent bunk too.
- Jim: But you were hot-bunking then before that.
- Butler: No. Only one stretch of time that I ever remembered hot-bunking and that was during maneuvers out in the Atlantic there, I said, right before the war.
- Jim: Then it was crowded.
- Butler: When we were there, we had four on and four off; four hours on watch and four hours off watch. We did that for about 30 days, or so. But, on the mine sweeps,--[ **Tape 1 Side A ends** ]-- no, we weren't hot-bunking it. I was pretty much a senior petty officer on there and so I could –
- Jim: So, when you became an ensign, your duties really didn't change?

Butler: Didn't change at all. Didn't change whatsoever [laughs]. And I was assigned – Well, I'd also become assigned as a gunnery officer, as well as a navigator; a navigator as well as a gunnery officer. But I stayed right on and the captain of the ship, at that time, was a, again, he was a druggist. And ah, his executive officer was a hotel manager. And they told Evelyn that they were never so glad to see anybody get married in their life as when I had gotten married. She was working. We were, at that time, we were training minesweeping crews out of Long Beach. And, she was working out in Hollywood, working for a Boeing aircraft factory, I guess, out there as a secretary. And she worked the swing shift. So, I was going, leaving the ship and, when we were there in Long Beach training crews, we had three nights off and one night of duty. So, on these three nights I had off, I always went out to Hollywood, picked up Evelyn, my future wife, and by the time I picked her up; she got off work somewhere around 11:30 p.m., by the time I picked her up, we'd get a bite to eat and, I got her back to her apartment [tape goes blank].

And west Los Angeles and ride to downtown Los Angeles and transfer down there to the Pacific Electric trains and take the train and get back to Long Beach just about 7-o'clock in the morning when our new crews would start coming aboard and we'd go out for school again.

Jim: You were teaching school without any sleep.

Butler: No. That's the reason they said they were so glad to see me get married because now I could get some sleep [laughs].

Jim: Oh my. So, you were there and now you were commissioned in May of '44, it says here.

Butler: Yes.

Jim: So, then you stayed there on the West Coast most of the time?

Butler: I was on the – West Coast and West Coast ships. Well we took – Now ah, May of '44 or May of '45, yeah. In '45, we took three minesweepers up to Alaska, by Cold Harbor, Alaska, way out on the Aleutian group of islands and gave it to the Russians, part of the Land-Lease territory. And, while we were up there, going up, I noticed that one of the – in one of the official publications that they were wanting people for aerial navigation work. Now, I had tried to become an aviator. I had applied for aviation school when I was still on the Tennessee as a quartermaster. But, at the time, they wanted quartermasters, they wanted people to train in surface navigation. But, when we turned the minesweeper over to the Russians up in Alaska, then got back into Seattle, I didn't have orders to go anyplace because they weren't sure – ah, they couldn't write our orders ahead of

time. They didn't know when we would be reporting in for duty. And, at that time, I requested Aerial Navigation School. So, at first, I was assigned to a destroyer in Long Beach and I went to Long Beach. And, by the time we got to Long Beach, my orders had been changed and I reported there to Aerial Navigation School in Clinton, Oklahoma. So, I went to Clinton, Oklahoma and I was in Aerial Navigation School when the war ended. From there, I was assigned to a B-17. The Navy had a group of B-17s at Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. And, these were B-17s that they had taken the bomb bays out of them and installed radar in them. They were the first AEW [Airborne Early Warning] planes. You've got now, what, the AWACS [Airborne Warning and Control System] planes? Well, we were the first of those. The B-17s had a big dome down and under the belly of them and I was assigned there as a navigator. From Willow Grove and then Atlantic City and Atlantic City to New York and New York to Quanset Point, Rhode Island. At that time, the Air Force just came into existence. Before that, it was always the Army Air Corps. But, after the war, then they formed a –

Jim: You weren't discharged from the Navy before this?

Butler: No. No, I was in the Navy all the time.

Jim: When did you decide to stay in?

Butler: During the war, my enlistment was -- actually would have been up in 1941. But my first enlistment, there was no way I could get out of it. And by the time the war was over with, then I got at least 10 years in the Navy. And I said, "Another 10 years I can retire. So, why quit now?" So therefore, I stayed on and then when I got into aviation, I loved it. We were flying – we flew in and out of hurricanes, and, off the East Coast there for about a year, a year and a half. And then I went to San Diego or Miramar [Naval Air Station] on the West Coast. I went from there to Japan, not Japan, rather to Guam, flying through typhoons, on the Pacific.

Jim: What did they designate those B-17s when they were in the Navy?

Butler: They were VX-4. They were 17s. They were still –

Jim: Did you still call them 17s?

Butler: B-17s, yeah. At the end of the war or well, when I left them, the B-17s and oh, I'm going to say, probably about 1948 or '49. We had the only B-17 pilots in the military service [laughs]. The Air Force and –

Jim: They were all gone?

Butler: All down, all the B-17s were phased out and they had the B-26s and then B-25s in the service. So, they wanted to ferry some of the aircraft from someplace down in Texas to that graveyard they had over in Arizona. So they sent a couple of our pilots down there to fly these B-17s for the Air Force, because –

Jim: Now you see them up in Oshkosh.

Butler: Yeah. So I had some 2,000 hours of aerial navigation work before I –

Jim: So you didn't regret staying in?

Butler: No.

Jim: Did you stay in for 20?

Butler: I stayed in for 27.

Jim: Twenty-seven?

Butler: Yes, sir. I went from aviation I went back to surface ships again.

Jim: When was that?

Butler: During the Korean War. I was on the *Noble*, a troop transport, the *Noble*.

Jim: What was her hull number?

Butler: Oh, she was APA-218.

Jim: Is that an A-P-A, or an A-P?

Butler: A-P-A.

Jim: A-P-A what?

Butler: 218. The *USS Noble*. I was a navigator. Well, I was CIC [Command Information Center] officer first and then became a navigator on her.

Jim: You were a three-striper by then?

Butler: No. I was a two. I was a lieutenant then. Yeah, I was a lieutenant and then a navigator and from the *Noble*, I went to the *Paul Revere*. I think I got the *Paul Revere* on there.

Jim: Oh Yeah. What was that?

- Butler: Well, the *Paul Revere* was APA-244 [248], I believe her hull number was because I had a couple of them there with a 44 end, a 44 number.
- Jim: Did the –
- Butler: I was the operations officer on it.
- Jim: Being on an APA, was that a lot different than your other ships?
- Butler: Well, it was a lot different than minesweepers. But, again it –
- Jim: At least you could walk around without hanging on.
- Butler: Yeah, you could walk around on it. You had quite a few more people on it, too.
- Jim: Oh, yeah.
- Butler: Because as APAs, we'd handle a battalion. We'd handle about 1,400 troops.
- Jim: And the food was better.
- Butler: The food was good for us, although on the minesweeper, we had a cook there and we had good food on the minesweepers, too. In aviation, we had some problems because we were flying at night. We'd fly 16-18 hours at nighttime and all you had were these stale sandwiches or what have you and we'd try to get fresh foods: steaks or eggs, or something. We had hot plates and we couldn't convince them for a long time, except yeah, when we were in Guam. The commandant in Guam one day came up and talking to our plane captain said, "Well, you people are flying in these hurricanes. What do you do out there?" And, we tried to tell him. He said, "Well, I'll tell you. When are you going to fly again?" "Well, we're going out tonight and next time, the other planes go tomorrow night and we'll be going out Wednesday night." And he said, "Well, I want to go out with you." We said, "Alright, fine. But, you know it's going to be a 16-hour flight by the time we fly from here up around Iwo Jima or maybe off the coast of China \_"
- Jim: You were charting the weather?
- Butler: We were flying hurricanes, yeah. We'd fly into them keeping track of their direction and the wind velocity and how they were going. And I've been in B-17s flying backwards. They sat there and said, "You can't be." Well, B-17s go about 160 miles per hour and you get a 200 mph wind, you were

going backwards [laughs]. I was the navigator and I knew where we were going. But, the story I started, to say about the commandant there, when we found out that he was going to fly with us, which was agreed. So, we flew that night. We took one of the box lunches, put the commandant's name on it and put it to one side. So, two days later, when he was flying with us, about two o'clock in the morning, we were ready to eat, so we got his box lunch and gave it to him. Now it was old, stale bologna sandwiches with nothing but mustard on them and a little orange juice to drink. There was no coffee because, flying up at 14,000 feet in nonpressurized planes, you don't boil water. It gets lukewarm and it's perking like mad. But, you don't get hot water.

Jim: Oh, I see.

Butler: So, he didn't like his lunch at all. And, we told him we didn't like them either. We hadn't liked them at all and we'd been trying to get some canned goods from the supply officer there and such. And he said, "Well, you'll get it from now on. You tell him what you want. You want steak and eggs?" From then on we got steak and eggs, canned beans, or what have you that we'd fix up there on the hot plate in the plane. So, from then on, we got good food.

Jim: That's great.

Butler: But we flew – we'd head to Iwo Jima, we flew into Kwajalene, Wake Island, Midway –

Jim: How long did that duty last?

Butler: I was in the air corps about four years with that before I went back to the ships.

Jim: That was the Navy Air Service?

Butler: The Navy Air Service, yeah; VX-4, VPB-1 [Patrol Bomber Squadron]. The name of it changed, from VX-4 to VPB-101, but we were still flying the B-17s, doing the same job.

Jim: Right. Now this was during the Korean War?

Butler: No. That's before the Korean War.

Jim: OK.

Butler: In the Korean War, I was aboard the *Noble*.



- Jim: Oh. That's right. You mentioned that.
- Butler: We landed troops on Korean and, you know, so we picked up troops and evacuated troops out of Korea.
- Jim: I was on the hospital ship *Haven*.
- Butler: *Haven*, huh? Oh.
- Jim: And anyway. So, how long – Was it March of 1954 you got out of Korea?
- Butler: I left Korea, came back to the States and I'm trying to –
- Jim: Beach Jumper Unit One.
- Butler: Yeah. That was a –
- Jim: What kind of duty was that?
- Butler: That was duty, which at that time, was top secret. We had some aviation crash – 65-foot aviation crash boats. And we rigged them up for electronic surveillance, electronic jamming, radio and radar jamming and ah, our job was tactical deception, they called it. So, we'd take these small boats out and we'd try flying box kites with radar reflectors on them and we ended up flying small dirigibles.
- Jim: Right.
- Butler: I don't know how – I'm trying to think, 35-feet long, I think they were. We'd fill them up with helium and have them tow radar reflectors. What we would do – I went out onto Japan on one special operation with the commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Fleet out of Japan. He said he wanted us to hide his carriers. He said they were going to go to sea and they were going to [unintelligible] as for a war problem. They were going to declare war and he says, "You people are supposed to be the experts and I want you to hide my carriers for me during this process." "All right Admiral," I said, "except you're going to do what I will tell you to do. When war is declared," I said, "you turn off all your radar and all your radio communications." "Oh, we can't do that," he said. I said, "Yes you can. You were in World War II before we had radar. How did you keep distance on the ships in those days?" You had a statometer that let you physically measure the distance between ships and then you'd take your binoculars and you'd find when you were 700 yards from where you were supposed to be, see how much of the binocular field that ship covered. I said, "So, at night time, that's all you're going to do now, just use those binoculars; visually tell where you're at."

“Oh well, we can try it, I guess,” he said. I said, “Then take a radio off the ship, take one out of your radio room, and put it on an airplane.” I said, “I know you have to send messages, but send them out. I gave him the general location that I expected to be, let him go out there and send his message out in the blind and come on back and land on the ship and you can receive all you want to. Nobody ever knows it, see.” But, they get a position on that airplane and then they’re going to come out looking for it. And he said, “That’s all right. That’s what I’m going to do. I’ve got this destroyer.” And I said, “Now go out at night right before dark at night. We’ll go out and we’ll set up a ring of balloons around, with radar reflectors, around this destroyer. So, when the search planes come out, what they see is a big target surrounded by three or four small targets.” And I said, “That’s an air craft carrier and destroyers.” The next morning, by the time, before they got out there, we’d go out and pick up all these radar reflectors on the destroyer. And, we’d go on and go another 40 or 50 miles away from where that one spot was and – I’d been in aviation and so I knew what the range was. So, we’d get right out to the edge of their radar range and lay these, set these down out there and they’d come out and nobody’s there. And they were all madder than heck because they couldn’t find their target. The guy who had been on patrol the night before, he knew there was a target there. He had seen them. They took photographs of them on the radar scope. But, they’re not there now. So, we did that for five days before one of the airplanes off the *USS Kersarge*, I guess it was, got lost. And they had to have the radar beacons and everything on. There were only 50 miles off the coast of Japan. And, they turned on all the beacons and lit up the whole coast of Japan [laughs]. They were quite surprised. They found it, but I got a letter of commendation somewhere in my records on that one. I could tell a lot of sea stories on that destroyer there. When I reported, went to destroyers, see, and I told the captain of the destroyer where we were going to go. And the admiral, he said, “Well, you take your orders from Mr. Butler.” I was a lieutenant at that time, I guess. So, the captain asked me, “Where are you going to go?”

I said, “We’re going to go out here,” and there was a big storm out at sea. “We’re going to go out in the middle of that storm. That’s where I want to be, because these airplanes come out and they can’t see you visually and they’ve got to go by their radar.” And I told the captain of the ship, the *Kersarge*, where I was going to be because he needed to know the general location to send his airplanes. The captain of this destroyer said, “Have you ever been on destroyers before?” “Nope, I’ve never been on one of them; never been a crewmember.” And he said, “Well, you know where we’re going.” I said, “Yeah we’re going out there into the storm area.” “Oh,” he said. “You’ll be sick as a dog.” “I’ve never been seasick yet,” I said.

So, we'd go out and he was sitting there for two weeks waiting for me to get seasick. We were out there in rough seas and, in order to eat, you had to lock your feet around the station and they'd give you – The stewards would give you the food in your plate and you'd hold it. You never put it down on the table because it would be gone if you did. So you would hold it and eat. The captain and I were the only two officers on the ship who ever had eaten full meals. Coming back into Yakuska there he used to sit and call me all kinds of names, he'd say, "You son of a so and so. You'd been on a destroyer all your life."

I said, "No captain, I haven't. I was with the Beach Jumpers, you know. I was executive officer of the Beach Jumpers." He said, "Yeah?" I said, "Do you know what a Beach Jumper has?" "No, I don't know. I don't know anything about it," he said. "Well, we've got 65-foot crash boats," I said. "We go out in this stuff in those crash boats." He said, "Oh you so and so. Why didn't you tell me that?" [laughs] And he was kind of mad at me because he didn't know that I'd been riding these small boats, smaller than that destroyer, for some time.

Jim: So, when did your career end?

Butler: Well, I was assigned to Dubuque, Iowa. During your final tours of duty, they try to send you where you want to go. Now the Navy, as you probably know, has a promotion system. After you're passed over twice for promotion, you're supposed to automatically retire as of the 1<sup>st</sup> of July of that year. Well, I did not have any college education and a direct commission and such. So, I was a lieutenant commander and I was passed over for promotion to commander. And I was given an opportunity of remaining on active duty if I so desired. So, I said, "Yes. I'd like to stay on at least another year." And they then assigned me to Dubuque, Iowa as the commanding officer of the Reserve training center in Dubuque. I tell them down there now, I hate to admit it, but I didn't even know where Iowa was, let alone Dubuque, Iowa, because I had come into the Navy from Tennessee and then off the West Coast; California and Seattle, WA and Honolulu. I knew where those places were. And I also knew from the aviation.

Jim: So, when you retired then, you just stayed –

Butler: No. Ah, yes, but I was at Dubuque as commanding officer of the Reserve training center there for two years and then I went back to sea again. I went to the Military Transport Service out of New York. And, I ended up on the *USS Buckner*. I don't remember what her hull number was. But I was a military commander on her for a little over a year. I was sailing between New York and Bremerhaven, Germany.

- Jim: Transporting soldiers and sailors?
- Butler: Transporting primarily soldiers. We'd have 1,200 soldiers and 600, what we'd call, cabin cash passengers. That would be sergeants and their wives, or the families of the officers, Army officers and their wives who were assigned to Germany or Italy or any place in the European theater there. We'd take them and sail between New York and Bremerhaven, Germany. After four days in Bremerhaven, Germany we'd load her back up again with another 1,800; 1,200 troops and 600 family units and sail back for New York. After four days in New York, and back we'd go to –
- Jim: That's pretty good duty.
- Butler: Well, I liked it. I enjoyed it very much. I was the senior military officer on there. So, I had the run of the ship and I had my own lauder room, had my own table and my steward who took care of my group.
- Jim: You were living like a king.
- Butler: Yeah, I had two doctors, a nurse, two Corps WAVES [Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service] and about six enlisted men. And then we were in charge of all the Army and responsible for getting them aboard and taking care them. And, I finished my career up there in the Military Transport Service.
- Jim: So, what did you do after you got out of the service?
- Butler: Well, when I got out of the Navy, I didn't know what I was going to do. And I came back to Dubuque and I had taken my wife, while I was in New York, before coming to Dubuque, I talked to them there – While I was in the Military Transport Service there, I had asked about, you know, taking my family Germany on the ships. So, I made arrangements that the next sailing after I retired; the next sailing of the Buckner to Germany, they were going to leave two staterooms open. They said, "We'll try to leave two of them open for you, commander. You just be in New York." By then, I was a lieutenant commander. I'd gotten a – "You be in New York on sailing day and, if there is space on board, you can go." So I called Evelyn here in Dubuque and asked her if she wanted to go to Germany. "Oh yes, I'd love to. When?" And I said, "Well, we're going to sail the 6<sup>th</sup> of July," I think it was. "So, I'll come back to Dubuque and pick you and the kids up and we'll come back to New York in time to take the ship." That's what happened. I took them and we went to Germany and spent six weeks just in Germany alone with a wife, six children. None of us – My wife could speak German but none of us could speak a word of German. We had a great time and then I came back to Dubuque and one of the men I knew from the Naval Reserve there said, "Well, the St. Regis Paper Co.

out there is looking for a purchasing agent. Their purchasing agent is going to retire in another year and they're looking for somebody to take his place. So, why don't you go out there and see them." Hell, I'd never been in purchasing my life. I've been on the bridge of a ship. But, I went out at any rate and saw the general manager there and talked to him and told him I had never been in purchasing or anything. He said, "I don't want someone purchasing as such. I want somebody to learn the box business and know how to make paper boxes and what we need and how to do it." I said, "Fine, I know it's going to be a year before Walt, the current purchasing manager, retires. So, I'll take the job if you want, if you'll have me and I'll learn it." And meanwhile I was acting as an accounts receivable clerk and learning the job. I said, "If you feel – any time you feel I can't do the job, just tell me and I'll quit. No harm done. After I've been here three or four months, or five months, I feel I had to have liked the job, If I don't like it, I'll tell you and that'll give you enough time to get another man before Walt retires." So, he said, "Okay, fine." So I went to work for him under those circumstances. Eighteen years later, then I retired as purchasing manager from St. Regis.

Jim: Did you join any veterans' groups?

Butler: Well, I did later. Now I had belonged to the American Legion. However, I started in the Navy League. I don't know if you've heard of that or not. I started the Dubuque chapter of the Navy League. That's a long story, but Admiral [Maurice] Sheehy, who was the first chaplain to ever make admiral – Admiral Sheehy was a Roman Catholic chaplain. And, we had the Blue Angels in there for a flight demonstration and such there at Dubuque. And, we had them two years in a row. Admiral Sheehy was not in the Navy at the time, but he was chaplain down in Cedar Rapids and Cedar Rapids kept getting after him saying, "How come Dubuque has got the Blue Angels in there when they don't even have a Navy League chapter?" So, he came up and got hold of me. I was commanding officer of the training center at the time. And he got hold of one of the prominent lawyers there in town, who was also ex-Navy. He got the two of us together and he said, "You will start a Navy League." He said, "Commander, you form a group and start a Navy League here at Dubuque. I want to get these people off my back for you having the Blue Angels in here."

Jim: Have you kept track of any of the guys you were aboard ship with?

Butler: Well, one I do; one of them out in California. He's up – I'm trying to think where he is now. Stockton, California. Phil Soulin [?] yeah, he was a quartermaster, one of the quartermasters. I still keep in touch with him. He called me just about six weeks ago. His wife had died. And he called me

to tell me she had died. We'd been together, Evelyn and myself and he and his wife, to two or three of the *Tennessee* reunions, yeah.

Jim: They have reunions for the *Tennessee*?

Butler: Yeah. They have one every year, someplace in the country. They've got one this May, the tail end of May, down in San Antonio, Texas.

Jim: Are there still some left?

Butler: Oh yeah, there are some left. The *Tennessee* went out of commission in 1946. So ah, there are still a number of –

Jim: Did they destroy it?

Butler: Yeah, they destroyed it. They cut it up and sold it for scrap metal. We had a sidelight on there. We had a chief turret captain on the *Tennessee* who went aboard the *Tennessee* in 1919, right when it was first commissioned. And, he stayed on that ship until 1946 when they decommissioned it. And he stayed on that same ship his whole career in the Navy.

Jim: Now, that must be some kind of a record.

Butler: I imagine it is. Jess Deacon, the same ship. He was a turret captain –

Jim: How many years?

Butler: Well, 1919 to 1946. Twenty-six, or 27 years, yeah. He knew every rivet in that turret. In fact, when I first went aboard there with the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, he was the turret captain of 4<sup>th</sup> Division at that time. So I knew him from the –

Jim: What was his name?

Butler: Deacon. Jess Deacon.

Jim: That's really unusual.

Butler: Well, during those days, it wasn't unusual for them to stay aboard the same ship forever. No. They stayed aboard a ship for years where now, if you stay aboard a ship for two years; that's about the tour of duty on most of the ships. In fact, the officers routinely, they're all transferred after two years duty at the station. They move them around every two years, yeah. I was a line officer and fortunately I was never assigned to engineering. But a line officer is subject to any duties, from gunnery to navigation, to engineering, to any duty on the ship. Of course, the quartermaster, as long

as I was on the deck of the ship, I was at home. If they had put me down in the engine room, then I would have been lost.

Jim: Well sir, thank you. I think you did it.

Butler: Did I? Sorry. I get started on some of these sea stories and they stretch on and on.

Jim: You did just fine. I appreciate it.

**[End of Interview]**