

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
ROBERT BOTTS
Tank Commander, Marines, World War II
2001

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Botts, Robert (1922-2010). Oral History Interview, 2001.

Approximate length: 80 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

Robert Botts, an Illinois native, and resident of Madison, Wisconsin discusses his World War II service in the Pacific Theatre of Operations as a tank commander in the United States Marine Corps with the 11th Defense Battalion fighting on the Solomon Islands, at Guam, and with the 4th Marine Regiment, 6th Marine Division at Okinawa; his return to the US and discharge in February 1946; his use of the GI Bill, his postwar career, involvement with the VFW, medals earned, and the lingering medical effects of his wartime experience. Botts joined the Marines upon graduation from high school in the summer of 1940. He relates his basic training in California, and his assignment to a tank division at Camp Lejeune (North Carolina). After Thanksgiving Day 1942, Botts' ship left San Diego for the Pacific. He tells of setting up defense perimeters, and communication-wiring, hunting for Japanese saboteurs, fishing with TNT, and establishing an exchange system with the native inhabitants on Florida Island in the Solomons. He offers his observation that the density of the foliage on New Georgia Island, and their respective unfamiliarity, rendered the forward progress of both tankmen and Army infantry less than ideal. He speaks of meeting the aces "Pappy" Boyington and Joe Foss. Botts details the July 1944 assault to retake Guam amongst Japanese banzai charges and friendly fire casualties. He imparts to the three month campaign on Okinawa a sense of the extra grimness that proceeded from an easier than expected Easter Sunday/April Fools' 1945 invasion. Botts arrived back in San Diego in summer 1945. He relates the circumstances that kept him in the service until February 1946.

Biographical Sketch:

Botts (1922-2010) served during World War II as a tank commander in the United States Marine Corps with the 11th Defense Battalion and with the 4th Marine Regiment, 6th Marine Division. He was involved in the Pacific Theatre of Operations. He was discharged in 1946.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2001

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Transcribed Interview

McIntosh: May 3rd, '01, talking to Bob Botts. What year were you born, Bob?

Botts: 1922.

McIntosh: Where was that?

Botts: Industry, Illinois.

McIntosh: What—.

Botts: Industry.

McIntosh: Industry like an industry?

Botts: Yeah, just like an industry, I-N-D-U-S-T-R-Y. And my grandfather was the local medical doctor there and was born in his guest room.

McIntosh: Ah, and when did you get to Madison?

Botts: Uh, December 1959.

McIntosh: '59?

Botts: Mm-hmm.

McIntosh: Now, tell me about getting into military service, how did that come about and so forth?

Botts: Well, I graduated from high school in June 1940, and you couldn't buy a job then down in Illinois.

McIntosh: Or anywhere else.

Botts: Yeah, so I just scrimped, and, well, I went squirrel hunting there, and I got a ticket for shooting squirrels out of season, and I knew the sheriff in there so he had me lay out in jail down there instead of payin' the fine, helped his wife do the dishes And his son and I went down to Saint Louis on the last day of I was supposed to be in jail [both laugh] and joined the Marine Corps. And out of seven guys that applied there's only two of us got through. They were pretty strictly then.

McIntosh: You mean just to get in—five guys they didn't want.

Botts: Five guys, they couldn't get in for either for physical reasons or they're color blind or whatever.

McIntosh: But it was the physical that kept them out?

Botts: Yeah, physical that kept them out.

McIntosh: So you joined the Marines that summer then, the summer of '40.

Botts: September 3rd.

McIntosh: Of '41?

Botts: 1940.

McIntosh: 1940, right. Okay, and where did they send you for your training?

Botts: San Diego. Recruit Depot in San Diego.

McIntosh: Was that an eight week or a twelve week at that time?

Botts: I think it's twelve.

McIntosh: Twelve, I think it was a little longer then.

Botts: Yeah [loud noise].

McIntosh: And from there did they give you a specialty of some kind?

Botts: No, I just went to regular boot camp in there, and then I was assigned in the Guard Detachment at the Naval Air Station in San Diego on Coronado Island [loud noise]. I stayed over on Coronado Island, and that's where I was when on that Sunday morning they bombed Pearl Harbor. [loud noise] I was on guard duty that morning on the strand of the rock jetty that stands out and guards the harbor coming in [loud noise] passed Point Loma.

McIntosh: Oh, I see. How far from Ford Island were you?

Botts: From where?

McIntosh: Ford Island.

Botts: Ford Island?

McIntosh: Oh, no—I [loud noise]—this noise is drivin’ me crazy. From Point Loma, right. I know where that is.

Botts: Oh Point Loma, [loud noise] just across the channel coming in. There was aircraft carriers come in, and they had a big landing dock right out there right across from Point Loma, on the west edge of the airbase there. Admiral King was the NCO [CNO; Chief of Naval Operations] there [loud noise].

McIntosh: What changes happened right off the bat?

Botts: Well, nothing right to start with because that was the first of December that that happened, and I don’t remember the date but uh, shortly after that I was transferred over to start the 9th Marine Regiment. That went over on—.

McIntosh: The 9th Marines?

Botts: 9th Marine regiment in there and that was over at, uh—oh, what was—that base is no longer there [loud noise]. I can’t remember the name of it. Then I stayed out there, and the 9th Marines got pretty well going. Then they split the NCOs there, I got transferred to New River, North Carolina, out to Camp Lejeune which was just being built. Camp Elliott was out in San Diego. They were just opening Camp Lejeune, and a bunch of us was in the camp there one evening, and we was fooling around, and I came charging out of there and hit this first lieutenant and knocked him right flat on his back out in the sand down there! So I helped him up, and he said, “Sergeant, you like to get in the tanks?” I said, “Well it don’t sound too bad, but I just got transferred in here.” They were starting the 22nd Marines, I think it was then. He said, “Well, I have an order from the commanding general here that I can pick any personnel in this post, and we’re gonna start the tanks for the 11th Defense Battalion.” So that’s where I got into tanks.

McIntosh: 11th Defense Battalion, they called it?

Botts: Yup. So we got that pretty well squared away—.

McIntosh: Well, tell me about learnin’ to run a tank. Most were Stuart tanks then.

Botts: Yes, just like the one you’ve got on—.

McIntosh: Exactly, downstairs.

Botts: Yeah, downstairs here.

McIntosh: Well, was that a problem? They look pretty simple to operate.

Botts: Well, we had good instructors in there, and none of us was in there. These were all new tanks. None of us had ever even seen a tank before. So they gave us a job to get used to the tanks just knocking down all the farm buildings that was on Camp Lejeune out there.

McIntosh: Well, that was fun.

Botts: But there was nothing there. They just bought up a whole bunch of farm ground and stuff, and our base was—our club house was the farmer's house.

McIntosh: They were just getting started.

Botts: The garage was a one car garage there where we kept a shop in the barn was where we did our works on the tanks in there, and we lived in tents.

McIntosh: Did you practice in groups or individually?

Botts: No, in groups, in platoons, platoon size groups.

McIntosh: In a platoon, what was a platoon of tanks? About a dozen?

Botts: Five.

McIntosh: Five?

Botts: Five in there.

McIntosh: So you learned to operate in groups of five then?

Botts: Yeah. So I don't remember the date. Well, it must've been about in October of that year, '40.

McIntosh: Those tanks have telephones?

Botts: Pardon?

McIntosh: They have telephones?

Botts: No [loud noise].

McIntosh: You couldn't communicate one to another (??)?

Botts: The tanks, you mean? Oh, I had radios.

McIntosh: Radios?

Botts: Radio, [loud noise] yeah, I had two-way radio. And not a lot of communication with just the tanks and we could communicate with other organizations like the artillery and stuff like this [loud noise], but we couldn't communicate with the infantry that was working with in there. That's what got us into a lot of trouble, until finally somebody finally got the smart idea that they could hook a telephone into the intercom system in the tank, and those was mounted in a little metal box on the back of the tank.

McIntosh: Yeah, on the outside.

Botts: On the outside.

McIntosh: Yeah, sure, then some guy'd up and talk to you.

Botts: Yeah.

McIntosh: And you didn't have to crack the thing open.

Botts: Didn't have to crack anything open. They come up to talk to us, they could direct your fire and everything else in there. So that worked out real well. But we didn't get those until much later in there. I think before we went into Guam, but that's down the pike a ways.

McIntosh: So you were there for quite a while?

Botts: Well, yeah, most of that summer we got one of the ships (??), and that back to San Diego in the 1st of November I think it was, would have been of '42, wouldn't it?

McIntosh: It was after the war started so it would be in '42.

Botts: Yeah. Okay. And we were out there to Jack's Farm [Marine Corps training facility] for just about a month, and on the day after Thanksgiving we were loaded aboard ship over Thanksgiving, and we headed for the South Pacific.

McIntosh: Did you know where you were going?

Botts: Nope. We just know we're just heading across—.

McIntosh: You're going that way [laughs].

Botts: Just going that way, going west.

McIntosh: Of course everybody I am sure had ideas and theories about where you're going.

Botts: So, we were put on a Dutch freighter. The top cargo hold was equipped with bunks four deep [loud noise]. The toilets then was set on 4 by 6s and hung over the rail and no showers, no nothing, and we left there on the day after Thanksgiving, and we pulled into Noumea, New Caledonia on Christmas Eve.

McIntosh: In 1942?

Botts: Yes. And that's where we were supposed to go for a little while, but then just before we got there the skipper of a transport there had a bunch of Army on it, didn't take on a pilot, so he hit one of our own mines and sunk the ship so they were all there. So they had nothing else to do with us so they knew we could drive equipment so they had us operating landing craft unloadin' ships there for a while. And that's when the [USS] Minneapolis [New Orleans class heavy cruiser] came in with the hundred and five foot of the bow shot off, and a destroyer come in. It had a coconut log we're usin' for a rudder because one of their depth charges went off and blew the rudder off the back [laughs] of the ship.

McIntosh: Oh, my!

Botts: But we's there—and I don't recall just exactly how long we were there, but we went up to—.

McIntosh: You were still just this one battalion, though?

Botts: Yep, just the 11th Defense Battalion.

McIntosh: That's all.

Botts: That's all. So they shipped us up to Guadalcanal, but Guadalcanal was just about over so then we were there for just a few weeks, and then they transported us across the channel over to the Florida Islands [part of the Solomon Islands], and then we set up there as a defense battalion.

McIntosh: On Florida?

Botts: On the Florida Islands, yes [loud noise]. And we set up there as a defense battalion. Then we had .90 millimeter antiaircraft and the 155 rifles and all

that kind of stuff, one company of infantry, and our [loud noise] tank. That was all that was there. So, we were there for awhile, and I took my platoon, or just part of it. So I took three tanks, and they sent us up the island on the ocean side about fifteen miles for a listening post in there. So we were just [loud noise] drove up there. We followed the native trails up through there. Every once in a while we'd have to cut a tree to get through or something in there. Then we strung wire all the way up for telephone lines, and so there was—I think there was thirteen of us up there. And we had this two hour watch around the clock, and the native village up there gave us their council house. It was the only house that had a floor in it. It was up off there and to live in, and they helped us build a platform up in the coconut tree so we could—and we had to report every ship we saw, every plane we saw, and every plane we heard.

McIntosh: You were a buck sergeant at this time?

Botts: Yup. And so then there [loud noise] was a few Japs left on there, and they kept cutting our communications lines. So we'd send some guys out, and we'd patch it. And one day went out and there was a half a mile of wire gone. So, then we rigged up the antenna so we could use a radios to get back and forth. So that worked pretty good. And I was messing with the crystals in the radio one night sitting out there, and pretty soon it starts gettin' some music, and I couldn't figure out where the dickens I was getting music from. So I listened for a while, and it was Del Rio, Texas.

McIntosh: My God.

Botts: So then we got the natives there to skin up the coconut trees and put us in a better antenna. We had some good music, Del Rio, Texas and Tokyo Rose.

McIntosh: On a regular basis.

Botts: Yeah. But we didn't have nothing to listen to, only just the headphones in the tank.

McIntosh: Right.

Botts: So one day the chief of the village comes down there, and he could speak just a little bit of English. He used to work on some Chinese freighters and stuff in there, and so he come down, and he kept just lookin' and walking around the tank and listening, and pretty soon he said, "Music." I said, "Yeah, music." "Where from?" Well, all he knew about United States was like New York. I said "No, no, no. It's way across [unintelligible]. It can't be." So I took my helmet off and stuck it on his head. He took it off, and he looked in that thing [both laugh]. Then he disappeared, and he went and

lined up the whole village. I sat there for two hours putting that helmet on their heads, and “Okay, go, go, go,” get you going. So anyhow the natives said that there were three of those Japs that they knew of that was on the island. So, they kept harassing and cutting the wire and all that stuff so I called in. I got permission and I and another guy and some of the natives we’s gonna go off and see if we could eliminate that problem. Well, we never could catch up with them, and we were gone for about four days in there just living off of the jungle and other native villages, but we got up on top of one of them mountains, and we found there was one of grass shacks up there, and we went in there, and it was clear full of these little lanterns, like the farmers’ lanterns they use around here, one of the little miniatures about so high, about, you know. So the natives they had no idea what those were, and there was also looked like about twenty-five or thirty gallon drums of fuel there. So we finally got one of them open, and we got some fuel in three or four of the lanterns, showed ‘em what they was, and their eyes lit up about like silver dollars, and, man, they never seen anything like this in there. So I said, “No, the lanterns is yours.” So I said, “One of you go back and tell the village, and we will wait for you here.” So they—so he got back, and we took off. Well, I don’t know how they got all that stuff back down to the village, but when we got it down back there it was there, and we went and visited about four other villages in there, but we was always about half a day behind [unintelligible]. So we finally—well, at the last village everybody looked out, and here is one of these landing craft out there, bouncing in the, uh— .

McIntosh: Reef?

Botts: Coral out there, the reef. So I waded out to it and got in the thing, and I looked it all over, and, heck, I couldn’t see nothing wrong with it. So it had plenty of fuel in, and checked the engine oil, that seemed to be all right, so I turned on the power switch, got the thing to raise the gate up and it all worked. So I motioned to the other guys to come on. So they come out, they waded out there, and those three natives that went with us, got on the boat. So then we toured around the south end of Florida Island, took them back up to our camp. [loud noise] So then the next day I took it back up and it was Major Walker was our company commander, and I said, “What are you gonna do with this?” “Well,” he said, “Why don’t we just keep it here. It belongs to the Army. We’ll just keep it here. It’ll be our fishing boat.” So we had our own boat then [both laugh]. And that was pretty good duty. We got along real well with the natives, and we was shooting parrots and cockatoos and stuff for ‘em for meat, and they was furnishing us with fruit.

McIntosh: Oh, nice [??].

Botts: And yams, bananas, and all that kinda stuff, and one day I was on watch up there and here come a school of tuna in the lagoon, and the water in the lagoon is, oh like three and a half, four foot deep. So I hollered at some of the guys, and our fishing tackle then was half pound blocks of TNT—.

McIntosh: That's good.

Botts: So I hollered to some of 'em, I said, "Take about three of them blocks out there and put them out in a big circle, and then throw me up the detonator for them." Well, about that time the natives saw those fish coming in there so they got their spears and were gonna go out and get 'em, and Ben was the chief's name. I said, "Okay, Ben, don't let them in. Keep 'em out, keep 'em out, keep 'em out." So he was having a heck of a time keeping 'em out of the water so when the main part of the school of fish kind of got in the area where we had the charges I touched that thing off. I says, "Okay, Ben, they can go fishing." They went out there, and of course when you get an explosion in the water like that it crushes the backbones and the air sacks so the fish all settle on the bottom. And they started carrying the fish in, and they were tuna about, oh, twelve, fourteen, sixteen inches long, all about the same size, and they'd go out, and they'd pick up two in each hand. So we broke open some sandbags for them. They had thirty some odd bags, sandbags of fish. So the women then they started with just a shell. They split those fish open, take the entrails out, they wrap 'em in banana leaves, and put 'em in charcoal fire. And, man, we—that's all we did for three days and three nights—.

McIntosh: Eat good fish?

Botts: Was eat fish—could had no way of keeping them. They just cook them and eat them, cook them and eat them, but they were delicious that way.

McIntosh: I'll bet.

Botts: Then we got an order to pack up and move back to camp, and then, ah, then that's where they had got into New Georgia [part of the Solomon Islands] up there, and the Army didn't have any tanks up there. So wound up with the 9th, 10th, and 11th Defense Battalions. We left New Georgia with tanks. We had a lot of trouble workin' with the Army up there. They didn't know how to work with tanks, we didn't know how to work with the infantry, and, well, you couldn't see nothing anyhow. The jungle was so darn thick, you know. And, in fact, the jungle was so thick we would be following trails, and all these vines and stuff would be catching on the tank, and it piled up, and we couldn't go any farther. So we'd just stop, back off, get the infantry out of the way, we had those canister ammunition in. That's just a big shotgun shell, and we'd blow a hole and

cut the stuff out with that ammunition, drive through the hole, and that's the way—.

McIntosh: That was a .37 millimeter gun?

Botts: Yeah, .37 millimeter canister. It had 108 three-eighths inch steel balls in, each one of 'em. And that worked good for defoliating the jungle.

McIntosh: Didn't you have any napalm to put in there?

Botts: We got some napalm later in up there. Some of the Army had some little man carried flamethrowers, you know. We didn't have any in the tanks at that time. So we were up there at, New Georgia it was, until the Munda air strip was secured, and that's when—see, we were up there just to— I had made one trip around the airport with my three tanks in there. And we got to receiving a little bit of fire in there so, and then we come back to this Army officer there that was protecting the tanks with machine guns and stuff.

McIntosh: Sure.

Botts: And he said it was coming out of one of those planes over there. So we go down, and we started blowing up the planes and getting rid of that static, and we come back from that, and here comes three Corsairs [fighter planes] in there and landed. So they come running. I went over and talked to this one pilot, jumped out, and I said, "What the hell were you guys doing in here?" He said, "Well, we just saw the airstrip and thought we'd land." I said, "Well, heck we don't even know who owns the dang thing yet, [McIntosh laughs] but you best get your [laughs] fannies out of here." And I said, "By the way, who won the pool?" And he just grinned and got back in the Corsair, and they took off, all three of them. But they took off—there's a bunch of little pit-holes and stuff in there.

McIntosh: What's this pool?

Botts: Well, on the aircraft carriers a lot of times they had a pool for the pilots that landed on a new airstrip that we had just captured—

McIntosh: Oh.

Botts: Got the pool.

McIntosh: I see.

Botts: And I think it got to where—oh, what was the "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep"? What was his name?

McIntosh: Boyington.

Botts: “Pappy” Boyington [WWII Marine Corps fighter ace] brought his guys in there. I met them. In fact, I got I got an autographed book of “Pappy” Boyington’s, and also Joe Foss’s, too. They were both aces over there. I met both those people. So then after that, why, we was heading back [loud noise]. We’ve gotta go to Australia for some R&R, our unit. We’d been over now over a year, about a year and a half. Well, we got back down to Guadalcanal and this 3rd—let’s see, what was it? A Company, 3rd Tank Battalion. So that must have been the 3rd Division unit. They had lost three NCOs so I and two of the other NCOs we drew the short straw, and we never did get to New Zealand, you know. So went in and got training with these folks, and they had the—.

McIntosh: What was that outfit?

Botts: The A company, 3rd Tank Battalion.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Botts: We was on Guadalcanal, and I met some of the guys. The 9th Marine Regiment was in there. I met some of the guys that was in—helped start that with in there. So we was in there, [loud noise] and we had drawn new tanks up there. So then our first operation there, we went up and took a little island, Amaroo, I believe it was in there. There was some Seabees [Navy Construction Battalions]. [loud noise] It was unoccupied as far as Japs were concerned. So we set up a screen around that while they built an airstrip. Then there is an Army unit come in relieved us so then we back from that. Then we turned in all those little light tanks, and we got the new Sherman Tanks.

McIntosh: That was an improvement.

Botts: Huh?

McIntosh: That was an improvement.

Botts: Oh, yes. So then we got to train—.

McIntosh: A bigger gun [loud noise].

Botts: Oh, yeah, had a .75 on those. So we got all equipped with those in there, and we was all setting up and training to go up to Guam. We didn’t know that then, but that’s where we went. I forget the dates when we hit Guam, but, anyhow, [loud noise] we had—those tanks, we could fire on the run

accurately 'cause they had that gyro stabilizer on them. We could be running at about ten miles an hour, and the gun would just float. And the guys got so they could hit gas drums out there 700-800 yards. [loud noise] But the Japanese tanks was no—nothing against some of these.

McIntosh: They had no defense, did they?

Botts: We hit one of them with the .75 armor piercing. It had about a 500th of a second delay on the explosive charge. It went clear through the tank, and it blew off last two cylinders [loud noise] of the diesel engine. So they were just like boilerplate. They're just cast iron. You hit them with that armor piercing it'd just cave 'em in.

McIntosh: Now, generally the Sherman ran with three men?

Botts: No, five.

McIntosh: Five men.

Botts: Five men.

McIntosh: Okay, you—.

Botts: Driver, assistant driver, a loader, a gunner, and a tank commander.

McIntosh: You were the tank commander, I trust.

Botts: [loud noise] Yes, yeah, I had a platoon.

McIntosh: So you're still running five tanks, then.

Botts: Oh, yeah.

McIntosh: Your platoon was still five tanks.

Botts: Yeah.

McIntosh: Even though you changed—.

Botts: Oh, yeah. So then we were we all loaded up to go up to--.

McIntosh: Guam.

Botts: To Guam. But we were the floating reserve for Saipan until they see how that went. Well, then while we was out there circling around, why, the Jap Navy come out. So we were, oh, about a hundred days aboard ship out

there, 'til they got that fuss settled. So, then we went in to Amaroo in there. That a—no, it wasn't Amaroo—where the Navy had a big recreational place, I think it was Amaroo. And the [USS] Franklin [aircraft carrier] come—they towed the Franklin in there. It had lost steam in the Cairns.

McIntosh: Not Ulithi [an atoll in the Caroline Islands in the Pacific Ocean]?

Botts: Ulithi?

McIntosh: Yeah.

Botts: Was that—.

McIntosh: That was the big Naval base.

Botts: Okay, okay, Ulithi, yeah. So then we went in there, and we could get off the ship for a week, then go warm, sleep in our pup tents and stuff. But then we get a can of beer once in a while and get a little exercise.

McIntosh: Sure.

Botts: And then when they—when Saipan got settled in then we went down and hit the beach on Guam.

McIntosh: You made a landing there?

Botts: Yeah, we made assault landing there.

McIntosh: How was that?

Botts: It was rough. We slept in a foxhole once the tide come in, and it'll have water in it there for three nights in a row on the beach.

McIntosh: Tell me about getting to shore, though. Did you have trouble with the coral or any of that?

Botts: No, we didn't. Some of the tanks did, but the Navy goes in, they do a pretty good job of busting holes through there. And if they follow the hole or follow the lines or markers to get through the holes, but once in a while one of them would get hung up, or they'd take when they hit the beach they'd want to get out there in a hurry, and they'd drop the—on some of the tanks we just knocked the front door down to get out of there.

McIntosh: Bu they put you off about, what, ten, fifteen yards, or a lot further away from the beach?

Botts: Well, no, most of the time we could get into where we could run in.

McIntosh: Run on dry land?

Botts: No, we was equipped to run through about eight feet of water, and with most of 'em. But we could run in waist deep water without a problem at all. But they had a big gun up there on there that was covering that beach. Oh, they was blowing up boats and ships and stuff down there just one right after the other. But we finally got that gun, put it out of commission.

McIntosh: Who did that?

Botts: One of our tanks.

McIntosh: Oh, the tanks took it out, not one of the ships in the harbor?

Botts: No, no, no, they couldn't get into it. It was because it was—.

McIntosh: Right, it was too much gun.

Botts: Well, the ship was out, facing the beach this way, and this was something that curved round, and it was shooting—.

McIntosh: They built it right [laughs].

Botts: Yeah, they built it right, and we couldn't even see the dang thing—.

McIntosh: Oh, really?

Botts: In there so some of the infantry guys in there—.

McIntosh: To crawl up there.

Botts: No, they would—they started firing some tracer ammunition up there so one's spotting where the gun come out. It would come out of the cave and roll back. So then we threw a couple white phosphorus up there, and we burnt the brush off around that thing. The next time the gun come out we put a white phosphorus in the hole with it and it, blew the gun and people and the whole damn hill filed out. 'Cause we got into their powder magazine back in there somewhere, but, anyhow, that kind of calmed things down.

McIntosh: After that Guam was taken more easily then.

Botts: Yeah, but that was probably to us. We got that gun sometime during the first day. The second day, why, we had an [loud noise] Army unit come in that we was working with, and they went up to take over one section of the front, and the Japs hit that thing, and they got all upset and came running back through our park. We always parked away from the front line so we had a lot—we worked all night on the tank line.

McIntosh: Did you repair ‘em [loud noise]?

Botts: Huh?

McIntosh: You’d repair them? [loud noise]

Botts: Oh, yeah, repair ‘em, refuel ‘em, rearm ‘em [loud noise] and everything.

McIntosh: What was wrong? Were the treads a problem?

Botts: Oh, sometimes you get treads, and sometimes it was just, you know, just puttin’ the fuel in ‘em, checkin’ the oil, [loud noise] and repairing guns and all this kind of stuff in there. But all this mess comes charging back down through our camp and it was Army, and they said, “Japs, Japs, Japs are coming.” So we opened fire in there, and it was all mixed up with Army guys and Japs together. I don’t know how many dead people we had in our camp. We lost two guys, and I had two tanks set on fire.

McIntosh: They didn’t quite overrun you, though?

Botts: No, no, we stopped it. But, see, we would dig a hole underneath the tank in there, and that’s where we [loud noise] stayed in there. So we was kinda hard to get to, but anything above grade after sundown was open season.

McIntosh: Right. But you’d never seen a tank [loud noise] let ‘em in [??].

Botts: No, no. No, no [loud noise].

McIntosh: You say you usually dug your foxhole under the tank [loud noise]?

Botts: Yup, just brought a [unintelligible] up. We had a bulldozer blade and it just dig a lip out (??).

McIntosh: Sure, yeah. Enough for all the five guys?

Botts: Yup, all of us [loud noise] get under. Three guys would always sleep, or four guys would sleep, one guy on watch.

McIntosh: Mm-Hmm.

Botts: We always [loud noise] had somebody awake all night long. 'Cause you didn't know whether it was land crabs or grenades that was going to fall into the hole with you.

McIntosh: But anything that moved you guys took a shot at.

Botts: That's right.

McIntosh: I'm sure.

Botts: That's right.

McIntosh: Was this a regular bonzai charge—.

Botts: Yeah.

McIntosh: They were comin' on?

Botts: Yeah.

McIntosh: But you say our Army was falling back amongst them?

Botts: Oh, yes because they broke ranks up there.

McIntosh: I understand. So how did you separate them?

Botts: You didn't. It was after dark. You couldn't.

McIntosh: So a lot of our guys got killed by our own fire—.

Botts: Oh, yeah, it was about even. There was—.

McIntosh: You mean we killed some of our guys then?

Botts: Oh, yeah, sure. You can't avoid it, you know.

McIntosh: Yeah, that's right.

Botts: When something like that happens in there. And these guys were fresh; they'd never been under fire before. Our operation was, we go in, and we break 'em up, and as soon as we get strong point [a key point in a defensive position] break then we'd have other people come in and set up secondary positions in behind us in there.

McIntosh: Mm-hmm.

Botts: As soon as we got the organized resistance broken on any of the islands we packed up and left.

McIntosh: And turn it over to the Army.

Botts: Army or occupational Marines. Mostly Army, yes, but we had—there's a lot of Army units over there working with us, too.

McIntosh: How long did it take you to neutralize Guam?

Botts: Oh, we left there the—I don't remember the dates.

McIntosh: Was it a couple of weeks or longer?

Botts: No, no, I expect we was in there close to a month. Our unit—when we was driving up toward the old Marines Corps barracks and the Army airstrip up there and the Japs are falling back behind us—it was on a peninsula up there so we cut that off. So they was hung up because they had nothing but cliffs and us. They had to either jump off the cliff or come through us. So they decide they was gonna come through one day. And we had five tanks up there in a line across that thing and the infantry was with us. Each tank has two machine guns mounted, two spare ones to use, twenty clean barrels, 15,000 rounds of .30 caliber ammunition, and 125 rounds of .75.
[End of Tape 1, Side A]

Botts: Each one of those tanks pulled off of the line twice to rearm. When I went back that night I did not have a machine a gun that worked. I had no ammunition of any kind left in there.

McIntosh: Machine guns firing all day long?

Botts: Yup, we had no idea how many people we killed up there, but they was climbing over the pile. They'd be in there chopping on the front of the tank with a saber tryin' to—.

McIntosh: A saber?

Botts: It was a saber. These guys was all drunk, crazy.

McIntosh: I was going to say, he must have been intoxicated.

Botts: Yeah. Oh, we knew an hour before they was going to charge. They'd get all hipped up and hollering.

McIntosh: They're hooting and hollering?

Botts: Oh, yeah.

McIntosh: [laughs] You could tell what was coming.

Botts: [loud noise] I think it was Major Smith, I believe it was, that got ahold of one of the radios on one of the tanks. He said, "You guys better do an ammunition check." Oh, we was getting low, so we called back, and we got ammunition in a hurry in there. [loud noise] 'Cause it always come in [unintelligible] goes along with something [unintelligible] [loud noise]. A couple of days later we were trying to make contact with the 9th Marine Regiment, and we see people moving, but we didn't know who it was. But during this process in there, why, somebody come in on my radio. And he said, "Who is this?" I told him. "Oh, it's you Bob." It was Father McCorkle the Chaplain. I said, "What in the world are you doing up here?" He says, "Well, I thought maybe some of the boys might need us in there." "So what do you need?" "Well," he says, "you got an extra carbine?" "You know you're not suppose to carry a carbine." "Yeah, I know, but we always did." I said, "What happened to yours?" "Well," he said, "I sat down back here right back of your tank to tie my shoe, and one of them little bastards shot the stalk out of mine." So we gave him a new carbine, but then after Guam was over we went back and drew more tanks.

McIntosh: Where? Back to Ulithi?

Botts: No, at Guadalcanal. [loud noise] Our training base was Guadalcanal. So I went back to Guadalcanal, and we got all new tanks and got them all put together. Then we went up to our next big push was Guam [loud noise]. We kind of bypassed New Georgia. I was up in New Georgia for a long time before I got mixed up with these guys. Anyhow, we got all ready—getting all ready to go, and I took one of the new tanks, and I was out road testing there it with a driver, [loud noise] checking things out. We'd had some trouble with it. The Navy had a big dock up there. Went up there and turned it around, and I stopped and got out, and I seen this great big crate over there. Here it was a six cylinder, Gray Marine diesel generator sitting over there, and in our camp we had a little wash machine generator with one little stinking light bulb in there. So I got back in the tank and picked up the radio and I called maintenance. I said, "Hey, I got a problem up here. Bring the [tank] retriever in there with a cable". So I already had my cable around that box in there. So Bill Parks come up with the thing. He said, "What's your trouble? Put your cable around that box." And we hooked it up, and we took it back down there, and we fixed ourselves up with a nice generator. We had the best lit camp in town.

McIntosh: I'll bet.

Botts: I don't know who owned the generator, but nobody ever come to pick it up. So [laughs] we survived off of what the Army and the Navy threw away. [McIntosh laughs] But, anyhow, then we got ready to go up to—.

McIntosh: Your tank, by the way, is that gas or diesel?

Botts: Oh, those were—.

McIntosh: The Shermans.

Botts: The Shermans, those were diesel, had two Gray Marine diesel engines in them, six cylinder diesel engines in them. Now, the next bunch we drew where we went up to Okinawa, now those were gas engine. They had that big five hundred horse, Ford V-8 engine in them. It sounded like a B-24 when it was running. No muffler, no nothing on it, just straight pipe out the back. But on all those tanks we had that water kit, you know, to keep them from getting wet inside when we was makin' landings. Well, it always left a big trough in the back. So when we get ready to go up to the front in there we had to depend on those infantry to protect us. We couldn't see, had a thirty foot dead circle around us. So we'd go up in the morning, we'd throw a couple of cans of water back there and dump a case of rations, you know, beans or whatever, and our unit we bought five cases of cigarettes, my platoon. Had them all scattered out in the tanks. You go up there in the morning, and on Guam like it was raining somewhere on that island all the time. You see those poor devils up there, and he's trying to find a dry cigarette. I'd holler, "Who's your squad leader?" And a guy'd stick a hand. "How about a dry cigarette?" Well, he'd come over, and we'd give him a carton of cigarettes.

McIntosh: A carton?

Botts: Yeah, we bought five cases of them. You get a carton of cigarettes for fifty cents.

McIntosh: Yeah. Oh, I know the prices.

Botts: So I said, "How about a cup of hot coffee?" He said, "You shitting me, Mack?" [laughs] I said "No, get your canteen cups. You got your instant coffee, and we got hot water on the back of the tank, and while your there just grab you a can of them hot beans or whatever is back there." So they liked to see you come in the morning. Well, we relied on those guys to keep us out of trouble. Same way up when we got up to Okinawa. We done the same thing.

McIntosh: The new tank was much better?

Botts: Well, it had a little more refinements in it, but it still had the .75 in it. We didn't like that gas engine like we did the diesel.

McIntosh: You preferred the diesel?

Botts: Yup. Oh, they were a lot quieter. Heck, you could hear that gas engine coming for miles in there, and the diesel engine you couldn't hear the darn thing.

McIntosh: And speed wasn't important to you?

Botts: No, no, we didn't need speed.

McIntosh: I knew that they went faster.

Botts: We got a lot of miles on them once up in Okinawa there. But after we got to Guam, all wrapped up, new tanks, new replacements for the people we had lost, and the training was all set up, why, then we got ready to go up to Okinawa.

McIntosh: So tell me about Okinawa.

Botts: Well, we hit Okinawa on April Fools' Day and Easter Sunday morning. We really didn't like that one because we thought we'd really gonna have a tough time getting on the beach up there.

McIntosh: As it turned out it was okay.

Botts: Turned out it was a walk in a park in there.

McIntosh: The Japanese decided to—.

Botts: Pull back and—.

McIntosh: Pull back on the south end.

Botts: And after a couple of weeks we knew why they pulled back, 'cause they had defenses [loud noise] built back in there. Some of them hills we got in [unintelligible]. They was just—well, like a hotel. They had the kitchens, a hospital, sleeping quarters for the troops, and everything. And you just couldn't get into 'em.

McIntosh: [loud noise] Flamethrowers were the only way you could really deal with that?

Botts: Yeah, well we could throw some white—pumped some white phosphorous in there once in a while, white phosphorous grenades. One time they took a bunch of napalm up and poured it down through an air vent in one of ‘em, but there was just no way you could get those guys out of there. You see guys dropping all around you, and you couldn’t see anybody to shoot at. We took a real shellacking on that one hill, that Sugarloaf Hill there. We put a company of infantry, the 22nd Marines, on that thing three days in a row, and they’d go back the next morning there wouldn’t be a soul there.

McIntosh: They left?

Botts: Nope. They was all dead or wounded in there, and it was all mixed up. You could see they had a heck of a fight up there that night because there was about as many dead Japs as there was our people. ‘Cause you see them hauling the dead in those big six by six trucks, just be piled clear full, but there was nothing you could do about it. Then we got that big rain, and the tanks was about the only thing that could move. I hooked two of those six by sixes once on the back of the tank, and we went down to the quartermaster and drew rations and stuff, and I pulled both of them on that bow on the tank. There was about thirty inches where the bow of the tank comes out, about thirty inches high, and we was rolling mud in front of that, dragging them two trucks behind us.

McIntosh: Yeah, the trucks couldn’t get through themselves [loud noise].

Botts: No, uh-uh. Well, a bulldozer couldn’t either because they was built too low to the ground. They just get in there and they just—.

McIntosh: Sink.

Botts: Why, that mud was such in one place we got the tank stuck as we went out to get some coconut logs back away from the beach in there to make a shelter so they’d get—for the sun. I cut one of them logs off about ten or twelve feet long, and we’d fasten it to the track right back of the sprocket, and we’d thought, well, we’d just pull that right through there. We pulled that log clear underneath that tank’s hull. Doesn’t set it down another eight inches, never moved us a bit. [McIntosh laughs] So we were just sitting in a bunch of soup. No, but Okinawa then the 6th Marine Division we was in then.

McIntosh: You were in the 6th now?

Botts: Yeah, we was with the 4th Marine Regiment, 6th Marine Division. And the 4th Marine Regiment was made up of the old Raider Battalions, what was left of the Defense Battalions, and they got that 4th Marine title because

that was the old China regiment, that was the old 4th Marine Regiment was the China Regiment. Well, [loud noise] some of them got back to China, but after Okinawa I decided I'd had enough. I came home.

McIntosh: How long were you at Okinawa?

Botts: Well we landed there Easter Sunday morning, and [loud noise] we left there the 3rd of July. So I was there April, May, June—about ninety to a hundred days, somewhere in there.

McIntosh: You had the thing secured by then?

Botts: Oh, yeah, [loud noise] but we lost a lot of people in there. Now tanks, we never took a lot of casualties. Once in a while they hit a big mine, and it would—well, a mine would blow the whole bottom out of the tank and blow that ten ton turret clear off it. Of course it took those guys with them, but most of the time I don't think—I never lost a person that was killed.

McIntosh: In your platoon?

Botts: Well, in my own personal tank, but I lost—well, let's see—I lost three tanks in—no, four tanks up in New Georgia. And we lost two tanks in Guam and [loud noise] must have been about four in Okinawa. [loud noise] One of them we like to drowned in that one. The US Army was trying to get the airstrip at Naha [capital of Okinawa Prefecture], bunch of guys pinned down up there. Fortunately, I saw a minefield before we got in it. So I got out and checked the surf in there. We was right along the beach [loud noise], and I couldn't find any mines out there so we was running along in that surf about three foot deep. I don't know if it was a bomb crater or whether it was just a hole in the reef or what it was, but the next thing we knew [loud noise] we had fish streamin' in front of the—we had four foot of water on top of the tank. and it was ten foot high.

McIntosh: Huh!

Botts: [loud noise] So you sat in there and waited till the thing fills up with water and you get out. But that was getting pretty much towards the tail end. Those Japs had those natives brainwashed that we would come into some of these villages, and they would walk right in to a big artillery bombardment. We had interpreters up there trying to talk them out of it and stuff. And we was sittin' there on the edge of one of these villages back in the brush there. One day I had my tank platoon in there. I heard something and looked over the side, and there was a little girl, [loud noise] looked like she might have been two and half, three years old, just scared

to death. She was just trembling. Got a hold of corpsmen, and they took her back.

McIntosh: Away—.

Botts: Took her away.

McIntosh: Jeesus. She wandered out from her village [loud noise]?

Botts: Well, they just went off and left her, I suppose. I have to wonder she didn't get run over by one of the tanks or something because she's standing right there side the tank. So then when some of these natives would start to comin' back then we'd talk 'em out of it with interrupters and stuff. And so we was sitting up on the tanks, and we were watching every one of them. And pretty soon one of my guys just up and shot one of them. "What did you do that for?" "Look at his shoe." And what it was it was a Jap soldier with a kimono on.

McIntosh: Oh, my.

Botts: They mixed right in with them in there. But they would not give up, none of them. [loud noise] So we had a lot of fun over there. We got to meet a lot of different people. My tank didn't get knocked out, but I got the radiator blew up. I was tryin' to get the aim so I could get a flamethrower down in back of a hill. And I couldn't get in there so I had to call for some artillery. So about that time that big gun opened up on me again, hit us three times, but it just broke the radiator. One infantry guy said, "You better get out of here while you got coolant left." [loud noise] So we took off. I went back, and I got back to where the company commander was up there, a little teepee on that little hill back in there. It said, "Somebody was calling for some artillery up there, and I can't get a hold of him." I said, "That was me." "Well," he said, "I got a smoke coming. Make a correction on it." Well, it popped over there. I said, "Well bring it in about fifty yards, and then let it roll." Man, we heard them things coming. Well, it was a battleship out there, and he cut loose with a broadside. That's three of those projectiles, you know, those sixteen inches in diameter. And, man, I tell you, they hit right back in that hole. Then one of my other tanks went up, took my place up there to try to keep things down because they's throwing grenades back on top of the hill. And I said, "Move that stuff back up where it was. You better get on the radio, and get them guys out of there because that ship is twenty-two miles away, and there's two more salvos on the way." And that was about, oh, just a couple of hundred yards from where General Buckner was killed that day. And I think the same gun that we finally got there was the one that killed him. Then after Okinawa, why, we went back to Guam. We was there for—well, let's see—we got back—must of gotten back about the middle of July. Got

back down to Guam. So then we all loaded up and headed home. While we were aboard ship that's when they dropped the nuclear bomb over there, and we got back to San Diego, and then we were quarantined.

McIntosh: Quarantined?

Botts: Quarantined to the base.

McIntosh: Because?

Botts: Because we had just come back from overseas, and there was all kind of crude going on over there. More physicals—.

McIntosh: Was that standard?

Botts: That was standard.

McIntosh: Nobody came back without spending some time so they could look you over?

Botts: Yup, yup.

McIntosh: Make sure you aren't bringing back some unpleasant animals in your body.

Botts: Yeah, and, oh we got that jungle rot we called it. It was some—.

McIntosh: Yeah, but that's not contagious particularly.

Botts: No, but, anyhow, the Marine Corps base in San Diego is almost downtown, and they was tearing that town apart, and they wouldn't let us out of there.

McIntosh: Oh, well that's the reason to quarantine you [loud noise].

Botts: No, I don't know, but, anyhow, so finally there was enough of us there that was heading east that they had five Pullman cars. Then they loaded us all in the Pullman cars, and we broke up in St. Louis. And would you believe these guys hadn't seen a town for almost three years. And they hadn't seen any women for that long, and they put us on a siding in Fort Worth, Texas for three hours. And you could see the Pabst Blue Ribbon signs blinking down the street [laughs]. So I had the charge of one of the guards. [loud noise] "So what we going to do? We can't keep these guys locked up in these cars." I said, "I am going to pick up all the travel orders and lock 'em up in my room." That's what we did. And we told all of them, "Okay, you can get out and run around. The train leaves at such and such a time. And

if you don't make a train your orders will be at the recruiting station in St. Louis." "Well, how we gonna get there?" I said "Buddy, this is your transportation, if you miss it you gotta use your thumb." So we took off, and only three guys missed the train.

McIntosh: Did they meet you in St. Louis [loud noise]?

Botts: No, I just took the papers up to the recruiting officer up there. See, I was [loud noise] supposed to give 'em to some captain up there. "What am I supposed to do?" "I'd just chew their ass out and send them home." So then I got home for thirty days, and that was the first leave I'd had since in September in 1941.

McIntosh: Since you left San Diego.

Botts: Since I left San Diego. I didn't get home for almost five years altogether, a little over four years. So I got thirty day leave, I got married, and we reported into Washington D.C., Quantico, Virginia.

McIntosh: They wouldn't let you out?

Botts: No. They said, "Where in the hell have you been?" I said, "Why?" They said, "You have enough points to get out three times in there." But when I got into San Diego, reported into duty down there, they said, "We don't have any more room for second lieutenants here." And I looked around, and he said, "No it is you. You got a field commissions caught up with you."

McIntosh: Oh, my.

Botts: From—on Okinawa. So went in, got that, and had my head all bandaged up, and the general said—.

McIntosh: Why was your head bandaged up?

Botts: Oh, I had that damn crud, and they had to cut most of my hair off.

McIntosh: Oh, from the [unintelligible].

Botts: They cut most of my hair off trying to get to it. And I reported up there at the general's office, and they said, "Shrapnel?" I said "No, sir, just the Chinese crud." [virus] [laughs] So then I got a letter from Marine Corps Headquarters wanting to know if I wanted a permanent officer commission. I said, "No, I don't believe so." So then he said, "Why don't you come to my office?" So I went up to his office, and he said, "How come you don't want a commission?" I said, "Sir, now I am a gunny

sergeant; that's one step away from the top. If I took that commission I'd be a second lieutenant, and I'd get every shit detail that you people didn't want!" He bust out laughing, he said, "Son, you're right."

McIntosh: You'd be right back at the bottom.

Botts: Yup, so then since I didn't take that I wasn't supposed to get out until the end of November 'cause then I didn't accept going into for the OCS. They had me report back and reuse up my acquired leave and report to Great Lakes Naval Training Station [Lake Co., Illinois] for discharge. And that was in February 26th in 1946.

McIntosh: '46?

Botts: '46, yeah.

McIntosh: So did you use your G.I. Bill?

Botts: Yeah.

McIntosh: What'd you do with that?

Botts: Well, I took an on the job training type of thing with it with an appliance dealer in town.

McIntosh: In Madison?

Botts: No, no, Macomb [Illinois].

McIntosh: Back in Industry? Oh, Macomb.

Botts: Macomb, Industry is a little farming community about like Mt. Horeb is to Madison.

McIntosh: I see. So in Macomb you took this.

Botts: In there, and I worked for those people for five years. Then a heating and air conditioning firm-- I went to several trade schools while I was working for them. And then I went to work for a heating and air conditioning firm. I worked for them for about another five years. And—well, between those two I worked for Admiral Corporation up to Galesburg, Illinois in quality control department. I worked out of the Chicago office down near the manufacturing plant. That was a good job, but we just had two little kids, and I was on the road a lot so finally I had been gone for almost two weeks.

McIntosh: Yeah, that's enough.

Botts: And Boss called me, and said, "When did you get home?" I said, "Yesterday." "How come you didn't come into the office this morning?" I said, "Haven't been home for two weeks. I'm just not coming in today." "Well," he says, "Monday you're supposed to be—" I said, "Monday I ain't supposed to be anywhere." He says, "Nope, you gotta go to Fort Worth," I think it was. I said, "No sir, I'm not going." "How come?" "I just quit." He said, "You can't do that." I said, "I just did". So I went down to Macomb, stopped at the heating and air conditioning company that I had worked for just a short time, and I said, "Need some help?" "Yeah, you can start Monday." So I said, "No I can't do that." So I said, "A week from Monday." So I just drove along down about a block, and I parked in front of a realtor's office down there. He just come out of the door, and I said, "Hey, Foster, what's the status of your mother's house?" "Why, it's on the market, why?" "What do you want for it?" He told me. I said, "I'll take it." "Don't you want to look at it?" I said "No, I put the heating system I, so I know [both laugh] what it is." But I said maybe Mary would like to go take a look at it. He says that's the fastest piece of property he ever sold. So then I worked for them about five years, and I went out to—they was building a new hospital in Macomb. So I went to sell em' some ice making equipment, and I lost the sale of the equipment, but got a job out there, a chief engineer job for the hospital. So I worked there six months before it was open.

McIntosh: In Macomb?

Botts: Yeah, in Macomb. I don't know whether you knew Earl Frederick, the administrator.

McIntosh: Yes.

Botts: Well, Earl was my boss down there. [loud noise] He was the first one hired, and I was the second. So then Earl come up here after about a year. And I got a letter one day from Madison, and I just thought it was from Earl [loud noise], and I was busy, and I put it on my desk. I didn't look at it for two or three days. Here it was a letter from Gordon Johnson wanting me to come up and apply for a job up there. So I called Earl. I said, "What's going on?" He said, "I was supposed to call you before you got that letter, but," he says, "you know me. Well, I do things tomorrow that I was supposed to do yesterday." So he said, "Why don't you come up and stay with my wife and I, you and Mary and go over and visit with Gordy." So I turned the job down the first time it come up. And he said, Gordon said, "You mind telling me why?" I said, "No I'll tell you why. It is the biggest pile of junk I ever had the misfortune to look at, and I am not really interested in trying to put back together." "Well," he said, "that's

plain enough.” So I went back down to Macomb. Well, the next week the chairman of the board for the hospital [loud noise] come out to my house on a Saturday morning to see how this new administrator was doing his job. Can you imagine that?

McIntosh: No.

Botts: And I said, “Now look, I don’t know what the administrator job is, and if I did know [loud noise] I wouldn’t tell you. You are clear out of line, even coming out there asking a stupid ass question like that. Now get the hell out of here.” So I threw him out of the house. Well, about thirty minutes I got the call from the administrator. So I went out, and he started in. I said, “Now, wait a minute. If you don’t get control of that hospital board, buddy, all you’re going to be doing is answering the damn phone and opening up the mail. They’re going to be running your business.” Well, that kind of upset him. Well, about a week later I got another call from Gordon. So after that little fiasco I had I said, “We better [laughs] go up take a look at—“.

McIntosh: Madison started to look better.

Botts: Yup. So I went up and we visited with him. We got up here on a Thursday, and Friday went out and spent the whole day with Gordon out at the hospital. Saturday I went out and bought a house, and Sunday we took off and went back home [laughs]. [loud noise]

McIntosh: When was that? The new [??_ year?]

Botts: Yeah, it was between Christmas and New Year’s. We moved up here between Christmas and New Year’s in 1959.

McIntosh: ’59?

Botts: Yeah. So up here then the first little project we got involved in—well, I’ll back up just a little bit. I come up here with a Southern accent, had three black guys working for me. Seymour McIntosh was one of them.

McIntosh: I remember him.

Botts: The other six guys were all white, but the youngest one was fifty-eight years old. I come up here with a Southern accent at thirty-eight years old. So I seen him about that right away. I said, “I got a big problem up here. Them people don’t trust me for nothing.” So I come to work in work clothes, and Gordon saw one day, “Well, your predecessor wore a suit and tie.” I said, “Yeah, it looks like it, too.” [McIntosh laughs] But I worked with them guys it’s about two weeks in there. So wet to church one

Sunday morning, went out to eat after church. I took off. Mary said, “Where you going?” I said, “I am going to see Warren McIntosh’ house.” “He knows you’re coming?” I said, “Nope.” “What are you going to tell the kid?” “Nothing.” Pulled up in front and rang the door bell, and Jim come to the door and opened it up, and his eyes got about that big around.

McIntosh: I’ll bet he thought he was in trouble.

Botts: “Oh, Mr. Botts, what can I do for you?” I said, “Well, Jim we just out in the neighborhood. We just thought we’d stop and say hello.” [both laugh] And they invited us in, we spent the afternoon there, had dinner with them that night, different attitude the next day at work. Then things started getting better.

McIntosh: Yeah. He was a neat guy.

Botts: Yup.

McIntosh: I really liked him.

Botts: Yeah. Oh, he hated—he wouldn’t go in the morgue, you know.

McIntosh: The morgue?

Botts: No. Oh, he hated that with a passion.

McIntosh: Always remember he liked going fishing for ducks out on [Lake] Monona. I’m sure he told you about that.

Botts: Oh, yes. Well, you know he fished out—.

McIntosh: With bread—.

Botts: On a hook and for a screen, his basement door [laughs], you bet. I was down there when he done that once.

McIntosh: [laughs] Slightly against the law, of course.

Botts: So I would go fishing with Jim and one of his buddies from McComb, Mississippi was up, and that’s where he was born and raised, and his sister live down there. But the morning that Jim died, Jenny called me so I went over there, and all those black men sitting around just wailin’ and carryin’ on in there. So I went down there, Jim had a big coffee pot, put a pot of coffee on and went and up and got a bunch of donuts and rolls. So we got all settled down, and Jim’s sister said if you ever get in to McComb, Mississippi I want you to stop and see us. So, I had a meeting down in

New Orleans with the hospital engineers group down there. So it just happened we made a fuel stop in McComb, Mississippi. So I asked the guy at the filling station, “Do you know where Sybil’s Bar is?” And he looked at me—.

McIntosh: He said, “Why would you want to know that?”

Botts: And, “Yeah, I know where Sybil’s Bar is.” “Can you tell me how to get there?” “What in the world you want to go over there? That’s niggertown over there, you know.” I said, “Yeah I know.” “Well, I’ll tell you,” he said, “Buddy you want to be careful.” Well, I went in there and opened the door and walked in, and you could heard a pin drop.

McIntosh: I’m sure.

Botts: And I walked over to the bar, and this guy looked at me. He said, “What the hell you doing way off down here?” And this was the guy who had been up fishing with Jim.

McIntosh: Ah! He recognized you.

Botts: Yeah, so I said, “Well, I stopped to see Sybil.” Well, everything went back to normal then when they knew this guy knew me. So we liked never got away from there, but so they was good people.

McIntosh: Oh, yes. So you stayed at Madison General how long?

Botts: I retired in ’81. We tore the old original hospital down and built the rehab building, and then we built the parking ramp and the new lab building and put an addition to the School of Nursing and the tower building in there.

McIntosh: I remember all those.

Botts: Yup, at one time I had twenty-eight different contracts working at the same time. Anyhow, Gordon and I got along real well. During that time the first thing Gordon did he bought me a membership in the American Hospital Association, individual membership, and also in the Executive Hospital Engineers of Milwaukee. So from that then we started the—and he insisted that you go to those things. So we started a little organization there with the guys, and we went over to Milwaukee that one year, one winter, and then we decided we’d start our own unit in Madison here. So we started that one. Now that unit has got six chapters in the State—

McIntosh: Oh, my goodness.

Botts: Every hospital in the state, and most of the nursing homes in the state. We have an annual meeting every September with a hundred vendors. And last year was the thirty-fifth year of that organization. I've been working with them ever since even after retiring. They even gave me a thirty-five year pin that year. So I told our president then, I said, "You know there's another guy who had a lot of to do with getting this thing started, and that was Gordon Johnson." Of course he was the president of the hospital engineers group then so he made arrangements [loud noise] with us to meet with them while we was tryin' to get our feet on the ground. So I invited Gordy and his wife to come up to the thirty-fifth anniversary. He couldn't believe that that was true (??), and we kept pretty close contact.

McIntosh: Did you join any veterans groups?

Botts: Yup, the VFW here. I've pretty active in that group just over here in Middleton.

[End of Side B, Tape 1]

Botts: [VFW Post] 8212 I think it is, but that don't make any difference. I forget. There my son and I both belong to it. We started with a little chapter out here south of Madison, but there wasn't enough members there to keep it going so we finally closed that one, and we joined this one in Middleton [loud noise], and they're a real active group. We worked with the Middleton Good Neighbor Fest every year. I probably hadn't ought to tell you this. We have the beer tent over there. You know how much beer that we pump from Friday night through Sunday evening?

McIntosh: No.

Botts: In Middleton for that weekend? It averages about two hundred half barrels [laughs].

McIntosh: Oh, my goodness.

Botts: So then out of that money then we've got I think it's six youth groups that we help support over there.

McIntosh: Awesome. Most of the VFWs are fading away.

Botts: Yeah. Well, we got a real active group over there. I know we've got—I think it's about a hundred and fifty flags so we solicit the business people to sponsor the flags. And we have the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts and those groups [loud noise] put the flags up five times a year. And we

maintain the flags and all that kind of stuff, and we give 'em five hundred bucks apiece for their group in there. We give a lot of money to Middleton. Well, we helped build that big ice rink.

McIntosh: You can do something in the museum if you want.

Botts: So what?

McIntosh: Help publish the book [loud noise] I am trying to write.

Botts: Oh, okay. I'll bring it up. We got a meeting tonight.

McIntosh: We could use five grand.

Botts: Do you what?

McIntosh: We need five thousand dollars.

Botts: I'll bring it up at our business meeting tonight.

McIntosh: Yeah, 'cause they haven't got any more grant money right now and [loud noise] I want to finish this book this year. It is going to take about eighty-five hundred dollars to finish it, and I don't want to put my money into it because I don't feel I should have to do that. But I want to get it done, so I thought, well, so maybe I'll look around. Maybe I can find some people who would like to help their fellow veterans.

Botts: Well, this outfit would do it. We've got some money.

McIntosh: Well, that'd be terrific. If you put five in the [Wisconsin Veterans] Museum can come up with the other thirty-five hundred. If they don't I'll take it out of my own personal funds (??).

Botts: Well, I think I told you I was instrumental in helping another author get his book written.

McIntosh: Oh, who's that?

Botts: That was—oh, [loud noise] the book on the Marine Corps tank operation in the South Pacific.

McIntosh: Oh, yes. Oh, that's right. You told me about that.

Botts: Yeah. [loud noise] And we had a reunion down in Arizona last March, and there was twelve of the guys showed up. And out of those twelve guys that

showed up there, there were five of them that was mentioned in the book. So that was kind of unusual, but, no, I'll really hit that.

McIntosh: That'd be terrific. If you could do that then I am sure we'd get the book published this year.

Botts: Okay.

McIntosh: 'Cause they said, well, we [loud noise] may have to wait until two or three years. I said, "Shit, two, three years, I'll be dead." You know, come on, I got—I'm hot now. I've got the book half written.

Botts: Okay.

McIntosh: All we need is some dough to make it move, and we can produce it this year.

Botts: Well my son belongs to them Vietnam Vet [Vietnam Veterans of America], and I think they have a little money. Hit him up, too. Well, he belongs to the VFW. I'll get a hold of him tonight.

McIntosh: I'll let you deal with that.

Botts: Okay. I'll get a hold—[loud noise]

McIntosh: Anyway that you could just, you know, [unintelligible] him or I get the publication of the book on the history—I mean, on the interviews, the interview book—.

Botts: [loud noise] I may even go over and twist old Bob Coats' arm over there, the hospital, see if I could get a little money off of him.

McIntosh: Oh, that'd be good. Sure, if they want to come up with about two thousand then we can have the thing just about done.

Botts: Yeah, but [loud noise] every once in a while I hear some big hairy ass mistake that they made over there, and I call Bob up and say, "Bob, I thought we taught you better than that." [both laugh] [loud noise] But anyhow when I retired from the hospital over there they had a retirement thing for me.

McIntosh: Oh, I'm sure.

Botts: Gordon says, "Yeah, [loud noise] we are going to miss you." I said, "Yeah, I bet you will." I said, "Yeah, every one of us know exactly where

you were coming from." A little background story on that—why—you knew Len Jenung over there?

McIntosh: Oh, sure.

Botts: He'd lie to you. He would lie to you when the truth was just better.

McIntosh: I didn't get along with him.

Botts: I didn't either. [loud noise] I got a change order one day down there when we were putting up the tower building. And it was for quite a good chunk of money. I don't remember the [unintelligible] [loud noise]. You know, like in the thirty thousand dollar bracket, somewhere in that area. And I went into his office to find out what it was all about. He says, "You don't need to know what it is all about." [McIntosh laughs] I said, "How the hell am I going to process a change order if I don't know what it is?" Well, he started giving me a bunch of static, and his desk was too wide, or I'd have grabbed him by his tie and I'd choke him to death right there. He made me so dadgum mad I just jumped up and went over—I didn't even knock on Gordon's door, just opened up and went in. And here sat John Secord and Gordon in there, chairman of the board, the administrator. And they looked at me, and I said, "Pardon me, gentlemen, but one of two things is going to happen before I leave this office. Either you're going to fire that little SOB next door or me." John said, "Sit down, Bob." I said, "No, I'll take my ass chewing standing up." [both laugh] And he says, "It's not for publication yet, but he will be asked to leave on Friday." I said, "Thank you, gentlemen" and left.

McIntosh: That's all it took. It is interesting—you know—I don't know if you remember the details. You probably remember everything, but the tower above the surgery—.

Botts: Yes.

McIntosh: There was some space up there where the air conditioning was.

Botts: That's right.

McIntosh: And I went up those stairs one day when it was being built because I was on the committee from the surgery to design--.

Botts: You guys had your office and lockers up there.

McIntosh: Right, the reason we do is because I found that space up there, and I went down, and I asked Leonard, I said, "What's that for?" "Well," he said, "That hasn't been designated." I said, "This would be a perfect spot for a

lounge for the people in surgery. There isn't any room for it when you've got all these huge operating rooms and so many more people. We need some room." "Well," he said. "I don't know if we can do that." "Well," I said, "you gotta do something." "Well," he said, "you know money is tight." I said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. You just designate it and finish that room up over there. I'll be responsible for fitting it out. I'll find every fucking piece of equipment you want." And I went out, and I got some money from the docs, and we contributed money, and we went down and bought furniture, sofas, tables—.

Botts: Yeah, I remember putting that room in up there.

McIntosh: Right. And we paid for it, us docs paid for the equipment, see, and that's how I got it out of Leonard Jenung. He said, "We can't do it." I said, "I am sure we can do that." He said, "They won't go up that stairs." They will go up the stairs if they're—and so it's a lovely room. But that's how we got it furnished because I found the money to furnish it 'cause Leonard wouldn't do that.

Botts: I'll tell you a little story about Gordon and the doctors. He called me one night at home which happened quite often every once in a while. And he was a practical joker from the word go.

McIntosh: Yes, I know.

Botts: He said, "Bob, do you know where I can get a hold of some of those coin operated locks for doors?" I said, "No, not really, but Jim used to worked for Pullman Company. I'll see if he can find some." So Jim he called around, and they wouldn't let any of them go. I said, "Gordon, what'd you want them for?" "Well, you know, we're remodeling the doctors lounge, and was going to go right up on the second floor right by there from the lobby in that little—over there." He said, "I want two of them to put on the doors in the doctors lounge, and I want a microphone up there going back to my office." He says "I want to hear what them suckers have got say when they find out I got the toilet doors and you got to put in a quarter to get in." [both laugh] We had a lot of fun there, but the place got so big you don't know anybody anymore so.

McIntosh: No, it's all gone away [??].

Botts: So.

McIntosh: Well, that's fine.

Botts: No, I'll see what I can do on that, gettin'—.

McIntosh: I'd sure appreciate that if you could handle that. All right, I can't think of anything. You forget to tell me anything?

Botts: No, I could tell you a lot of stories.

McIntosh: You didn't tell me about any awards you got.

Botts: Well, I got a Purple Heart twice. Once in—.

McIntosh: From what?

Botts: Well, I got—.

McIntosh: From rifle fire? You didn't tell me about that.

Botts: I got a machine gun bullet in Guam come through this scope. My loader, or my gunner, got cramps in his legs, and he was having a terrible time. So the tank commander can stand up so we changed places. So I started there, and I zeroed in on this machine gun nest up there on the peninsula on Guam and just got along side of him. I just moved my face away from the sight into the periscope. Had a little better feel of your vision. Then that guy opened that machine gun, and one of them bullets come through that sight and caught me in the arm.

McIntosh: Oh, my God.

Botts: If I hadn't moved when I did I'd either been dead or blind today. And the other one was before that, I got burned out of a tank up in New Georgia. I got hit with a .47 millimeter and set the tank on fire.

McIntosh: Everybody get out?

Botts: I got everybody out in there, and that's where I got my Silver Star out there. I got those guys all out of the tank.

McIntosh: But that's for what you got the Star for, for saving your boys?

Botts: Saving a boy and the skipper on another tank, that was Captain Carlson. They were confused, and they was headin' in the wrong direction to get out of there. I got in front of their tank and got them squared away on how to get away from that gun out there.

McIntosh: You turned 'em around.

Botts: Turned 'em around and got them heading in the right direction so they wouldn't get knocked out too. Then the next morning we went back in

there to get that gun. Of course, I didn't have a tank, and then when one of the other tank commanders was either sick or scared, I don't know which, but anyhow I was asked if I'd take that tank and go in there. We went back in the next morning and got the gun.

McIntosh: With your .37 millimeter?

Botts: Yeah.

McIntosh: Because this is still the Stuart tank.

Botts: Oh, yes.

McIntosh: And that gun that you were attacking was a what?

Botts: A .47 millimeter.

McIntosh: Oh, was it from a tank?

Botts: No, no, just a field piece. They got a bunch of them German .47 millimeters in there.

McIntosh: Oh, I see. That's a small gun, though, for a field piece.

Botts: Yeah, but, boy, they were high velocity. [loud noise] and they'd punch a hole in anything. The Shermans, we used to go over on the Sugar Loaf Hill area, I tied into one of those over there. I got hit eleven times with that thing. There is a facement in there, and on the ones that hit on the bow, that was three inches of steel there. It was still knocking chunks of paint off on the inside, but they got into my transmission. I couldn't move. But we sat there all day and got rid of most of our ammunition, and they pulled us out that night. We sat in that tank all day long. I got tanker fever so any when he showed up, opened the hatch, and started down, and one of those little devils was in a hole over there back of a bush in there. And that bullet just missed my head and went right around that circle in the turret lid of the lid of the tank—.

McIntosh: It circled the turret in the inside?

Botts: Yeah, right around back of my head.

McIntosh: Jesus Christ, that would have taken you out.

Botts: Yes, but I just dropped down inside, and I swung the gun around a little bit. Told the loader, [loud noise] I said, "You see that bush over there?" I said, "Now I am going to stick my helmet up." I said, "When that guy

pokes out of there, just don't mess with it. Just put a white phosphorous right in that hole." And we took a pretty good size chunk of hill up on the [unintelligible] white phosphorous got in there, but he got in the powder magazine or something, someplace.

McIntosh: That was your .37 millimeter gun that put the white phosphorous?

Botts: No, that was on the Sherman tanks. That was a .75.

McIntosh: Oh, this on the Sherman by this time .

Botts: And then I got a Silver Star up in Guam. I got a Bronze Star in Okinawa.

McIntosh: What was that for?

Botts: Oh, that's when we was trying to get across the river, or to get into Naha, the Naha outskirts in there. And before that I went in, and I pulled on into place and I burnt down about half the town in there. We got a bunch of Japs then because we had a good field of fire where they had to run across the road. And then blowing out bridges—and so I waded out one night, and I said, "I think we can ford that damn thing." We got out there, and the bottom was too soft, got one tank, got my tank stuck, but I had two more tanks behind me so we got out and got them all cabled together—

McIntosh: They pulled you back.

Botts: And we got pulled back. We didn't lose nothing in there. Then I had six battle stars on my—.

McIntosh: The Unit Citations.

Botts: Asiatic Pacific thing, and we got Presidential Citations on for two operations in there. But it was unique about our unit, we had the reunion there, we got transferred as a group which is unusual, and we was together the whole time when we was overseas, all of us that was, you know, except the replacements we'd get in from casualties.

McIntosh: Did you maintain contact with these guys?

Botts: Oh, yes. We've had—oh, yeah—.

McIntosh: The guys in your tank or just in the platoon?

Botts: Just in the company. There's about a hundred and eighty-five in the company in there, and even the officers kept track of it. And General Shepherd, we sent him an invitation once, and we worked with him in

Guam. He wound up as the Commandant of the Marine Corps. And we got a nice letter from him, said his health wouldn't permit him to come, but he would sure like to. We have had about twenty reunions in there, just had one last March. And that is when we got the book that the guy had written about, Ed Gilbert from Houston, Texas. And he attended the thing and talked to all the guys. So we've had pretty close contact. In fact, I just—one of the wives just called me the last week that her husband, he couldn't come to the reunion. He lives up in South Dakota, had a hip replaced, and he just got home last Thursday, I guess it was. So I may run up there next week and see him. So we keep pretty close. And I gotta go down to see my son in a couple of weeks, and I am going down and spend the night in Springfield, Illinois with another guy I was with. And two brothers, I talked to them, and they're going to come up and meet us up there, and we are all going to go out to dinner.

McIntosh: Oh, that should be lovely, just lovely [loud noise].

Botts: So we've kept pretty close contact.

McIntosh: Your family has stayed healthy.

Botts: Oh, yeah. I never did get hurt too bad in there. I had a lot of malaria and dengue fever [loud noise].

McIntosh: You had dengue fever?

Botts: That just about killed me [loud noise].

McIntosh: Yeah. The backache—.

Botts: Well, fever is so high and the last thing I remember before I passed out I reached out and grabbed a corpsman's pants leg. And it was either three or four days later I come around. Then they said, "Boy, we thought we was going to lose you. Buddy, you got a hold of my pants let. I thought I was gonna have to cut off my pants off to get loose." But just on one of them little old low cots, you know.

McIntosh: Sure.

Botts: But that stuff really takes the sap out of you. I lost—well, I weighed about a hundred and twenty pounds when I come back from Guam after having that fever in there.

McIntosh: How long were you in the hospital?

Botts: Oh, a couple of weeks I 'spose. I got hit in the arm in there like on a Tuesday in there. And of course we hadn't had any sleep for ten days in there all around in the mud and those corpsmen tryin', you know, the longer they wiped the worse we got. So I finally got to sleep about 3:00 in the afternoon, and I woke up. The guy said, "Boy, we thought we gonna lost you." "Why? What time is it?" He said, "Well, it's about 10:00 in the morning." "Well," I said, "that ain't bad 3:00 in the morning and it's 10:00 in the morning." He said, "Yeah, but you went to sleep at 3:00 on Wednesday afternoon [McIntosh laughs]. This is 10:00 on Friday morning." [laughs] So along with the knockout stuff that they give ya in there--.

McIntosh: And the malaria?

Botts: Malaria, I had that four times.

McIntosh: Enough to put you in the hospital?

Botts: Yes, I was in the hospital for two weeks after I got back out to Quantico, Virginia in there. And I've had it once since then, in Madison here only in '72, I guess it was.

McIntosh: Didn't last so long.

Botts: I was in the hospital almost three weeks.

McIntosh: Really? Usually it tapers off.

Botts: Well, this stuff really hit me in there 'cause I'd been having chills and fever for—.

McIntosh: This was in 1970s?

Botts: Yes, '71 I think it was.

McIntosh: Your last attack?

Botts: Yeah, and, well, I've had little flare-ups since then, but nothing like that, though. I was sick at home. I called Ann Smith, and she was working there that night. She said, "You get into the emergency room." And I was in there—I had a temperature up around a hundred and five.

McIntosh: Always do for that disease.

Botts: Yup, and then I had the yellow jaundice, [loud noise] and they always wanted me to give blood and all that stuff. Bob Boats, he said, “You don’t go down and give blood.”

McIntosh: No, you’d share your disease.

Botts: He said, “They won’t take it.” I said, “Ah, come on.” I said, “Okay, let’s go. I’ll go with you.” Well, they finally got by the malaria bit.

McIntosh: Oh, really?

Botts: They would take it, and they’d use it for the plasma.

McIntosh: Oh, just use the plasma.

Botts: Yeah. So then the next one was the dengue fever. Well, that they could still use that. Then I said, “Yellow jaundice.” [loud noise] They said, “Sorry, buddy, get out of here, and don’t ever come back.”

McIntosh: Yeah, ‘cause that virus could sit in the plasma

Botts: Yeah. So, anyhow, [loud noise] we had our share of problems. We had a lot of fun though, too.

McIntosh: And all the guys in your tank are gone?

Botts: Yup. In fact, I only know of about twenty-two of them that’s still living out of the hundred and eighty-five.

McIntosh: That’s probably about par for the course.

Botts: Well, we’re all eighty years old, plus or minus a few years. [loud noise] But we’ve kept close contact.

McIntosh: Good, that’s good. All right, we did it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]