

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
THOMAS BUTLER
Pharmacist, Navy, World War II
2000

OH
446

OH
446

Butler, Thomas, (1924-). Oral History Interview, 2000.

Master Copy: 1 video recording, (ca. 65 min.); ½ inch, color.

User Copy: 2 audio cassettes (ca. 65 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract:

Tom Butler discusses his time as a pharmacist in the Navy during WWII in the Pacific Theater. Tom Butler talks about how after attending UW-Madison for the fall semester of 1942, he joined the Navy and then reported to Naval Station Great Lakes for boot training in December 1942. He then states how he stayed at Great Lakes until January 1944 to complete his training as a pharmacist. Butler talks about how after training at Great Lakes he went to Virginia where he was assigned to a crew of an LST (landing ship, tank) and then trained in the Chesapeake Bay. Butler talks about how his LST transported men and equipment in the Pacific Theater, and first participated in an invasion during the 1944 Battle of Guam. Butler states how after his LST visited Guam, Guadalcanal, and New Guinea his ship participated in the Philippines Campaign. Butler talks about how his LST transported men and material to Leyte during this campaign and one of his sister LSTs was hit by a Japanese torpedo and lost 21 men. Butler describes how the invasion of the island of Mindoro was the scariest, because two neighboring LSTs were hit by kamikazes as they were unloading on the beach and shortly after this incident the cruiser Nashville was hit by a kamikaze as well. Butler states this was his first experience with kamikazes, and he mentions how they were called suicide planes back then. He talks about how one of the biggest problems that LSTs had was structural damage caused by coral and rough weather. Butler talks about how his LST landed on Okinawa on April 1st 1945 and then his LST began preparing for a November invasion of Japan, despite the dropping of the atomic bombs. Butler goes on to discuss how after the Japanese surrender, his LST transported approximately 500 Japanese soldiers from Chichi-Jima to Japan. He explains how the Japanese prisoners lived separately from the crew of the LST and were rolling on the ground laughing while watching a Laurel and Hardy film. He goes on to describe how he visited Japanese towns such as Matsuyama and Kagoshima, and how it felt eerie that the Japanese people would act like the Americans did not exist.

Biographical Sketch:

After attending UW-Madison for one semester, Butler served on an LST in the Pacific Theater of WWII and was honorably discharged in January 1946. After the war, Butler returned to UW-Madison and graduated in January 1950 and got a job as a reporter for a newspaper in Stevens Point.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2000.

Transcribed by Alex Rosinski, 2010.

Reviewed and corrected by Amanda Axel, 2012.

Abstract written by Alex Friedl, 2013.

Interview Transcript:

- Butler: The 25th I raised my hand and reported to the Great Lakes on February 1st.
- McIntosh: Now did you have an option to join the Navy, or were you encouraged to join the Navy, or was that a time where they were just assigning you?
- Butler: No, we joined umm--
- McIntosh: You would have been in the Army if you hadn't said so, in other words.
- Butler: Yes, I got to, I was going to the university. I went the first semester, '42 and I got the, I think it was around November, I got my 1A [draft status], we signed up for the eighteen year draft in June and got my 1A in about November, and then I thought, "I'm gonna go in the Army." My dad had been in the Navy in World War I, and I thought I'd like to go into the Navy.
- McIntosh: Sure.
- Butler: So I took my last exam at the university and walked uptown, went to the post office, the old post office up there and joined on the 23rd, it was a Saturday. Went down to Milwaukee on the 25th, raised my hand down there, and they gave us a week to settle our affairs and reported down to Great Lakes.
- McIntosh: And you did boot training in Great Lakes.
- Butler: Right.
- McIntosh: Good, and after that where to?
- Butler: Well, I wound up a pharmacist, I was in pre-med out here and--
- McIntosh: Oh were you?
- Butler: And as soon they see that you know, I didn't know what I wanted, so I just put that down and I went and eventually became a pharmacist, made second class and stayed down in Great Lakes until--
- McIntosh: You did your corps training down there too?
- Butler: Yeah, until January of '44.
- McIntosh: A whole year there you were—

Butler: Yeah, and went down to Little Creek, Virginia, and around the Norfolk area, and was assigned to a crew of an LST [tank landing ship], and we did a lot of training down there on the Chesapeake Bay with LSTs--

McIntosh: You were a pharmacist made third then?

Butler: Yes, and what I think when I got on, we got a new ship, an LST that was made in the Boston Naval yard, got on that with our crew, we went up there in mass and shortly after that, in second class it was, and now that I look back at it, we felt we were going over to Europe, but when I read all this stuff about the intense training and the long training it took over in Europe, now I can understand why we--so we went down to Guantanamo Bay through the canal and eventually wound up in Hawaii and our LST and then our first invasion was at Guam.

McIntosh: You were in a group of other LSTs?

Butler: Yep

McIntosh: What a dozen?

Butler: At times, we went on convoys and to Guam. And then after we left--

McIntosh: When you went over to Guam, you were just personnel only. You just had personnel and no equipment, or did you prepare equipment too?

Butler: To Guam? Oh no, we had artillery. We had lots of Army on there and then after, in an LST, after you unload that, you come off the beach and you go out to the transports and load up again and make a couple runs at the beach for the ships that couldn't get ashore. And then we took the advance Marines off of the island after the Army guys came in, and we took them back to Guadalcanal for R&R [rest and relaxation], I guess they had Marines down there. And then we were, I don't know if we went back to Guam or not, I can't remember that. We were down, I got a ship's log, we went to Guam, we went to Aduwetauk [?], Guadalcanal for logging, we were out in New Hebrides, Hollandia [New Guinea], and in all this time we were loading up and training and we also had pontoons put on.

McIntosh: Oh yeah.

Butler: And then—

McIntosh: You just had to crane the davits, swing over and pick those things up and drop them on the front end or—

Butler: We just dropped, these were huge. If you couldn't get near the shore, or, the tide was out, they dropped these off, we just dropped them off the side and towed them out in front of the bow doors, and the tanks and stuff came off the bow doors, and our next one was—

McIntosh: So the crew that managed those pontoon boats, were they part of your ship's crew?

Butler: Yeah.

McIntosh: So they had to get back on.

Butler: Yup. And then we went to the invasion of Leyte and we unloaded there on the, I forget whether it was the 22nd, and left the next day. At that time, one of our sister LSTs was torpedoed. They lost twenty-one men, well twenty-one dead, and I think they listed three missing, and we dropped the Higgins boat off, and they searched around for survivors, and couldn't find any. Then we had to take that LST, it was a 695, I think it was, and we took that in tow, and we were supposed to take it back to Hollandia, in New Guinea. But we were going about three knots, we didn't go very fast anyway in an LST, and we were towing this, and we towed it back to Palau, P-A-L-A-U, and—

McIntosh: Not Peleliu.

Butler: No, it's through that chain.

McIntosh: It is though.

Butler: And they had a burial at sea for those guys who got killed in that LST, and then we went back down to New Guinea, to Hollandia; made another run up to Leyte, and we were around Leyte for a while. Then our next invasion was Mindoro, which is a little island between Leyte and Luzon, and that actually was, although it was a very minor [invasion], I don't think we even got a Star for that thing because it was not considered a major [invasion], but that was probably the scariest one we had. We had LSTs on either side of us hit by kamikazes, and they towed them out, let 'em burn. They took the crews off, this was around the beach, they just came over the mountains and the radar never--

McIntosh: You all were ashore when they attacked you.

Butler: Yeah, and we left, we left there and the Nashville, the cruiser Nashville in the convoy also was hit by, that's the first time we'd seen any, we called them suicide planes, I don't know that we were aware of the term kamikaze until after—

McIntosh: Later in the war?

Butler: Yeah, I think so. Then we hung around the Philippines a long time, unloading the transports and bringing stuff into Leyte. There was all kinds of equipment on the beach in the Philippines at that time. We hung around there until we loaded up again, and then our next invasion was early in January in Luzon, Lingayen Gulf. We just stayed there a few days, came back to Leyte, went back down to Manus [Papua New Guinea] and Guadalcanal and the Russell Islands. We had several, about three or four times we had to go into floating drydocks, because the coral would tear the bottom out of our LST—

McIntosh: I was gonna say, there must be a certain limit to how many you can put ashore without damage.

Butler: It was one of our biggest problems. I think these pictures you guys sent me were from the Philippines, but we were in a typhoon once where the hull started cracking, we had to go into, you know it's a flat bottom boat—

McIntosh: Right.

Butler: And when it hit those waves, it just bounced, you know, it didn't cut through the water, and it was very vulnerable.

McIntosh: Not seaworthy at all.

Butler: It was seaworthy, but not in a storm like that. And then we went back to Guadalcanal, loaded up again, and then April 1st was, I'll always remember that, it was Easter Sunday, we landed on Okinawa, April 1st, and we stayed around there for a week, and then went back down to Leyte. In June we wound up around Saipan, Guam, Tinian, and I saw my brother who was an Army infantry officer; he was wounded up in Okinawa, and it just so happened that when we got to Tinian one day-- I think it was the only guy I ever saw from Madison was my brother, who was in the hospital in Saipan. So we stayed up there; of course Okinawa was our last invasion, just about the last invasion, but when we went back down to Guadalcanal, and we were operating around the Philippines a lot.

Then in August, it was funny how we'd hear these, you know, you hear so much scuttlebutt, and there was always, we'd hear we were going back into Lake Michigan to be a training ship and all that kind of garbage, you know, who'd ever want us back there? Then we heard this gigantic bomb hit a Japanese city and wiped it out. That sounded like another story; then in the news, the guys in the radio shack heard the news that it was actually true, but we kept loading up for a November invasion of Japan, we

assumed. Even after they hit Nagasaki, the same news came over, that didn't stop them at all, we started putting pontoons on again. We knew that even after, it was almost certain peace was in the air, we put on that second pontoon, I just, those were orders, and—

McIntosh: It's hard to stop things in the service.

Butler: We were ready to go and boy, we wound up then taking stuff up to Japan, we were at Matsuyama in November, Kori in November, Kagoshima, and then back to Guam, and then we went to Chichi-jima, near Iwo Jima, this was after the war. We took about five hundred Japanese soldiers back to Japan, after the war.

McIntosh: They had a prisoner of war camp there.

Butler: Yeah well, they had surrendered and they were, they just wanted to unload them back, so we had those guys on the ship.

McIntosh: How was that?

Butler: It was, you know they were just a stoic bunch. When we were in Japan, we were like in Matsuyama and Kagoshima, little towns, and you'd see, we'd walk around the towns and the villages and the outskirts where they had rice paddies, and people just ignored us. They were not hostile or anything, but they just, it was if we weren't even there, it was really kind of eerie. They were, the guys that we had aboard ship, the very vessel, they were resigned to their fate and I can remember, there were about five officers that would come up every day and eat with our officers in the boardroom, and they'd come in single file, according to rank, and there would be boots sounding, they were almost comic. They'd walk up here, and everything was so-so, and you felt sorry for those guys because they built like urinals out on the edge of the upper deck near the rail, and these guys, in ferocious weather would be out there, holding on toilets, you know. [laughs] We wouldn't let them into our cruise quarters or anything, and they stayed down in the tank deck, sleeping all over the place. What we did, and we had three barrels where they could go vomit in, because they were getting seasick, and it was an interesting thing, and then eventually we went to Tokyo. I got to go to midnight mass on Tokyo Bay on the battleship New Jersey in 1945. Then in January, we finally had enough. We had a real diverse crew, we had I think guys who had been in the North Africa invasion, and then guys who I think probably screwed up along the way [laughs] and they put them on—

McIntosh: Put them on some other ship.

Butler: Yeah, and then we had a bunch of guys like myself who were nineteen,

twenty years old.

McIntosh: Green as grass.

Butler: Yeah. They still have reunions, and they had one this year, I think just maybe fifteen guys and their wives show up now. I went to one of them--

McIntosh: That's all?

Butler: Yeah, so many of them are dead. We had a lot of guys that were older, but as soon as they start sending guys back home, almost immediately these guys who had been in North Africa [inaudible] prior to that, they had the points to go home early, and by that time I'm the only pharmacist. There were only two pharmacist mates on the ship anyway, a guy in first class and me. He was at North Africa, and he got to go home, and although I had some points I didn't get off of there until January--

McIntosh: Bummer. Of '46.

Butler: Yeah, because I was the only pharmacist and—

McIntosh: They needed you.

Butler: And they finally, I went home on a troop transport with a bunch of Navy and Army guys, landed in Frisco, and we'd get discharged at Great Lakes, took a train, a beat up old train back to, I can never remember, I could lay in my bunk and watch the tracks go by—

McIntosh: The cracks in the hull—

Butler: They commandeered every old railroad car they could find, I think, during the war.

McIntosh: I believe it.

Butler: As far as deprivation goes, it was about the worst we ever had, we all had jungle rot. We were constantly around the equator and we were sweating all the time, and guys would get fungus ear infections and things like that, and when I hear what these poor infantry men went through, I can't imagine, but I really know now why I went in the Navy.

McIntosh: Exactly.

Butler: But it was an interesting experience.

McIntosh: Yeah, that parallels my experience. I hated being away from home for a

year, but it was interesting. I was on a hospital ship in Korea for a year. Extremely interesting, and I got to do and see things I'd never done before. I wasn't really deprived at all, except the only thing being having to stay up long hours if there were a lot of casualties; we'd just keep working and sometimes we didn't get to bed for three days, but that was about all. Other than that, it was—

Butler: Well all we did was treat these, well we had some serious stuff, but we were able to take him off our ship and get him to a base hospital or something.

McIntosh: Yeah, we have to go back and I want to go into detail how you treated everybody.

Butler: Well most of all, every doctor seemed to have a different idea about how to treat this jungle rot that we all—

McIntosh: That's because they didn't know what to do about it.

Butler: I can remember I got it on my face, which really bothered the hell out of me. I had some kind of purple stuff I didn't—

McIntosh: Fungus.

Butler: Yeah. That was most of the problem, we did have an appendicitis and some doctor came aboard and took it out.

McIntosh: On your ship.

Butler: Yeah, up in the boardroom, and I didn't get to assist on that, the first class guy did.

McIntosh: What did you do for anesthesia?

Butler: I don't know what they used.

McIntosh: There wasn't an anesthesiologist or—

Butler: No, no, no.

McIntosh: Then they gave him a spinal.

Butler: It was pretty primitive, but if we had anything serious, we were always close to some island where we could take him off and there would be a—

McIntosh: Medical facility of some kind. Did you have medical equipment? Did he

have to bring his equipment to the-- [coughs]

Butler: Yeah, we had very little—

McIntosh: Minimal stuff.

Butler: Yeah. I did one time close a guy; you know, the most problems we had, we had fights on the ship. Some guy got hit with a dogging[?] iron across here, and we used to get two cans of beer; well some of these guys knew how to commandeer more than two. I often wondered how that ever came off of that deck, because the last time I saw those closed, it looked a little red around there.

McIntosh: The Major was pretty forgiving.

Butler: Yeah, but I poured a lot of—

McIntosh: So you did have suture material available.

Butler: Yeah. I did pour a lot of sulfur powder in there, he probably came out all right.

McIntosh: Oh, I'm sure he did. The head is so vascular that in fact everything heals in the head.

Butler: He didn't want it reported or anything.

McIntosh: No, it's not in the line of duty. It's like the tattoos, you know. When I didn't have anything to do on the hospital shift, these guys would come to me and want me to take off these tattoos. That went along fine, but then pretty soon the word got around, and then the medical captain found out about it and he said no more of that, those are not done during duty time, and it's not permissible for you to do that, because they were required when they were on the beach, so that put the end to that.

Butler: I can remember, I think it was at San Diego, that three young guys, they were all about eighteen and I was nineteen, they all, they were three buddies and they went off on liberty and all came back with the same girl tattooed on their arm. I often wonder if they went through life with that miserable thing on there.

McIntosh: I took off a lot of tattoos until I was stopped because all of them got it when they were drunk, and after about six months they hated it and they were embarrassed, and a lot of guys when they went ashore would wear something around their arm or they'd use a long sleeve, a jumper. They wouldn't roll their sleeve up because they didn't want anybody to see it

because it embarrassed them. They realized it's sort of like stamping "I am Stupid" right on your forehead and walking around. [Butler laughs]

Butler: Well these guys came back with the same girl tattooed on them.

McIntosh: Oh yeah. My father was a dermatologist, and he told me when I was at West High School, he said, "If you come home with a tattoo, don't bother, [laughs], I don't want to see you with a tattoo."

Butler: I never thought of that, that's one thing I wouldn't, when my girls were growing up, for a long time I would not let them get their ears pierced. There was just something about it I didn't—

McIntosh: Well, it's the same, it's like a tattoo, I mean it degrades you.

Butler: Yeah, the girls, eventually they did it, and they never got anything else pierced, so, and now you never know what they're doing.

McIntosh: I know, it's really shameful after they stop pretending. I tell you, remember Hank Roshanski?

Butler: Yeah.

McIntosh: He was in charge of a prisoner of war camp on Okinawa or one of those islands, and you know him, he was always looking for something to do. Different, that guy. Anyway, he taught [laughs] these Japanese prisoners, they worked them, and so he taught them "Heigh-ho, Heigh-ho, it's off to work we go," [Butler laughs] and he said, "I would have them parade up in line," because you mentioned that in line, that's what it reminded me of. He said they'd go up all along camp and out the front gate, all in single file. He taught them how to sing this [both laugh]. Yeah, he said it took a while, but he said eventually they got it just right, and they were pretty cute. [both laugh]

Butler: They used to get those guys sweeping the decks, and those prisoners could really wield those brooms, and I remember Chief Boson, he'd be on there. Every one of them he would call Tojo. He was like, "Come on, Tojo, get going," and those guys would go crazy. One thing I learned about on our way back to—

McIntosh: I'm gonna have to get this now.

Butler: -- to Japan, one thing that convinced me that Laurel and Hardy were really good comedians. We had a Laurel and Hardy movie we showed on our deck on the way back to Japan from Chichi-jima, and those, of course they couldn't understand a word of English, those guys just were rolling on the

deck laughing, those little Japanese soldiers, they thought that was the funniest thing they'd ever seen. I had great respect for Laurel and Hardy—

McIntosh: Right, they didn't need the vocals.

Butler: No, it was funny.

McIntosh: Now your ship carried how many crew?

Butler: 120.

McIntosh: 120. The deck crew and you must have had a loading crew, how did you divide that?

Butler: Deck crew, and then we had gunner's mates, and the guys, machinist mates, and when we were in drydock, all of us had to go down and chip paint when we got in drydock. Everybody was expected to turn—

McIntosh: Always.

Butler: Because we were just so few guys.

McIntosh: But there was two of you that ran the dispenser.

Butler: Yeah.

McIntosh: And you had sick call every day?

Butler: Yup. And any, like I say, any serious thing we got them off of there.

McIntosh: There was always a capital ship nearby that had a regular medical facility on it?

Butler: Just about always.

McIntosh: A cruiser, perhaps, probably that.

Butler: It was a pretty huge convoy.

McIntosh: Right.

Butler: And they had some really great facilities in places like Guam, and after a while at Guadalcanal, that was huge. Some of those places like New Hebrides and Liberty, we'd go over and we'd either get two cans of beer or two cans of Toddy, which was a chocolate drink from Australia. They

had beautiful facilities for the Navy, softball diamonds, basketball courts; they had these softball diamonds named Yankee Stadium or Fenway Park or something. They were well-kept, I don't know what the deal was there.

McIntosh: Did you have much rest time, or were most of your service—

Butler: Not really, and we were aboard ship an awful lot.

McIntosh: It would be a day or two only that you were on the beach.

Butler: It was rare that, we, when we were in Luzon, we never get to, of course Manila was really torn up then. We didn't get to, we were up at Lingayen Gulf. We did get to, it was Kori that we had liberty, and some of the guys got to go to Hiroshima, which I think afterwards was probably, in retrospect, was not the smartest thing to do.

McIntosh: No, it was still radioactive.

Butler: Yeah, cause that was just a few—

McIntosh: I visited Nagasaki.

Butler: Yeah. You did?

McIntosh: Yeah, but that was in 1950.

Butler: This was like in November.

McIntosh: Right, it was a couple months, yeah, it was probably still quite radioactive.

Butler: Yeah, but nobody knew that then of us.

McIntosh: Right. Do you remember the doctor Kim Scott, the hero from Tacoma[?]?

Butler: From here?

McIntosh: Yeah.

Butler: Yeah.

McIntosh: You know he died here this past summer.

Butler: Oh.

McIntosh: He died of an aplastic anemia, meaning that you're running out of red cells, you stop producing any kind of blood cell. It was felt that because he was on a ship and went ashore nearby and went to visit Hiroshima, I think it was four days, three days afterwards, and went back and forth a couple times, maybe made three visits in a week while the ship was nearby. It was felt by all the experts at the university that he probably got enough radiation at that time, which really set this thing in process, this process in order.

Butler: He had a hint of the track [inaudible]

McIntosh: Yeah, with [inaudible], yeah.

Butler: I remember, my son was a quarterback at West in the 70s and Dr. Scott was on the sidelines and—

McIntosh: Yeah, he did the team physician—

Butler: And Jeff's pediatrician was Gephart, no, Geppert.

McIntosh: Oh, Geppert. Same thing.

Butler: Not Tom, Chuck.

McIntosh: Oh, it was Chuck? It wasn't Tom.

Butler: He came out of the stands and ran out there because he told my wife, Dr. Scott's ear, nose, and throat. He shouldn't be out there taking care of--

McIntosh: Well he was a pediatrician, he didn't know any more either—

Butler: No, he didn't, no. He'd taken care of him since he was a little kid, in fact I think he used to take care of him after he was in high school. Geppert used to call me, my wife just rolled her eyes, he called me on Sunday mornings about the football game the day before, you know, 8:00 o'clock, 7:40.

McIntosh: He was a real jock sniffer, that guy. He wanted to get right in there and coach, and you know, get involved in every process they'd let him get involved in, he was really a fanatic.

Butler: Yeah, he was, but I don't think I'd call anybody on Sunday morning at 8:00 o'clock after a football game. [laughs]

McIntosh: Well, it would seem like the information would still be present on

Monday, you know?

Butler: [Laughs] You'd think so. But he was a good guy.

McIntosh: Oh yeah.

Butler: I think his brother's still around.

McIntosh: Not around here, he lives in Florida. You mentioned you had what, three-inch 50s [3"/50 caliber guns]?

Butler: No, we had forty millimeters and twenty millimeters.

McIntosh: That's all.

Butler: Yep.

McIntosh: That wouldn't repel a lot—

Butler: No, what it was was just, they'd get those, if there were a lot of them, that's a lot of firepower, especially in a place like--they had a lot of air raids around Leyte.

McIntosh: Yeah, fore and aft only, right, just not midships?

Butler: Yeah, we had them along the—

McIntosh: Oh.

Butler: And then the forty millimeters were aft and the two forty millimeters on top of the bow, and the twenties—

McIntosh: So your gun crew was a pretty good size, what about ten, twelve people?

Butler: Yeah, and with the LSTs, in fact, they liked to congregate those LSTs because if we had an air attack, that's a lot of stuff flying up there. Some LSTs had bigger guns aft.

McIntosh: Yeah, that's what I was asking, because I talked to one guy who had a three-inch or a five-inch gun on there. But of course most of those five-inch guns, if they shot it very often, it would start to shake off the top [laughs]—

Butler: That's right.

McIntosh: That's really, those ships were not, my hospital ship was built on a

base of an LST gun.

Butler: It was, huh? Yeah they weren't—

McIntosh: Not much. [laughs]

Butler: They put those together pretty quick up there—

McIntosh: Yeah, the Liberty ship, absolutely. The Liberty ship was what the base was of our hospital ship, but that's probably a little bigger. Ours was 527 feet long.

Butler: See, ours was 327, three hundred-some, wasn't that big.

McIntosh: And the captain was a, what—

Butler: Well we had—

McIntosh: Two striper, or—

Butler: We had two stripers, I don't know if that first guy was a commander or not—

McIntosh: Might have been a lieutenant commander.

Butler: Yeah, but we had about four or five different commanders-

McIntosh: Oh, really?

Butler: Yeah. In fact, I went to this reunion about 1995, I think, down in Williamsburg, Virginia.

McIntosh: Just your ship or the whole-

Butler: Yeah, just our ship. A guy by the name of Spawn[?] was our last skipper. I really don't remember him, I may have been gone by then. That crew is now quite depleted; there was a few older guys on that ship that are gone.

McIntosh: Yeah, I'm sure they are. How many officers did you carry?

Butler: I think there were about ten.

McIntosh: Ten.

Butler: See, I've got a list of some of those guys here. There was a radio man

who wrote the history, it was quite complete, the history of—

McIntosh: Of your ship?

Butler: --our ship, and it's interesting, I thought, maybe I don't have it here, but he had a list of—

McIntosh: All the commanders?

Butler: All the officers he had in there. I think that ship, the last I heard it was carrying mail or something around Seattle after the war. **[End of Tape 1, Side A]** That's the way it looked when we--

McIntosh: At least you survived the war.

Butler: --when we had the camouflage—

McIntosh: Oh that's right, did you paint that on? You guys?

Butler: It was painted—

McIntosh: Oh, it was painted before you got aboard. Did you go in the drydock at any time during your time in the Pacific?

Butler: Oh, about three or four times.

McIntosh: Oh, several times, I know, but I thought that was—

Butler: One of those places was the biggest floating drydock in the world, and this might have been it, I think it might have been, I know it was three times, it might have been—

McIntosh: So that would be what, a five day deal?

Butler: Yeah. One time we lost 70,000 gallons of oil, it got the coral. And when that, it just ripped the bottom out. But we stayed afloat, and we got into the drydock. We always, that was a rumor, but when that LST, that sister ship of ours got torpedoed, everybody thought that might have been a submarine that was the advanced party because we had heard when we were underway that there was a huge naval battle going on back at Leyte Gulf, that's the one where Halsey was up there, but that may have been an advanced sub or something on that thing.

McIntosh: The other LST, was hit with a kamikaze or a submarine?

Butler: Well, that was hit by a torpedo.

McIntosh: How did it stay afloat?

Butler: Well, it did. [laughs]

McIntosh: I would think most of them would just go down in one shot.

Butler: No, they probably closed all those hatches, and you know—

McIntosh: Right, it didn't hit in the right spot?

Butler: No, it hit back in probably the only place he could really hit an LST where—

McIntosh: Where it wouldn't sink it.

Butler: -- was in the back aft, and it got the screws and everything, and it got, that's where the crew's quarters were.

McIntosh: Unfortunately, yeah.

Butler: And that's where they got twenty one casualties, dead. And after that, we had [quarters], that were supposed to be for Army personnel and Marines personnel, there were quarters up along either side of the LST, so most of us moved up to that area [laughs] after that happened, but another ship, we didn't lay very low in the water, and crew's quarters was almost abandoned.

McIntosh: Yeah, crew's quarters had your bunks with three levels. And two guys to a bunk?

Butler: No.

McIntosh: Didn't have to, there was plenty of room, then.

Butler: Yeah.

McIntosh: On some of the capital ships, you know, they had to double up and, one in and one out—

Butler: No, uh uh. We had—

McIntosh: Food, tell me about your food.

Butler: The food, it was like me being in pre-med, we had a guy who was an excellent baker, but he told me, I think he swept up a bakery when he was in high school [laughs], and they sent him to cook and baker school. But

he was good. And most of the crew, some were real veterans. We had, one of the guys, we assumed he was an officer but I don't know if he was even a lieutenant, he may have been something else, but he had been a twenty-year man. I think he must have screwed up along the way to get stuck on an LST.

McIntosh: Right, that's not exactly a promotion.

Butler: No, and he, whenever we were in convoy in enemy waters, and he went top side to sleep, most of us usually followed him up there.

McIntosh: You thought it was a good idea weeping for that—

Butler: Yeah, we did. [James laughs] We had, as I said quite a diverse crew, one of the guys, his name was Hilford, he was in the Marines in the '30s. I guess when the war started he got in the Navy. But he had quite an interesting career, and our chief boatswain's mate who was also named Butler, his name was Ed Butler, he was from Saratoga, New York, and he was just a real old salt, and I had a feeling that he too was probably screwed up along the way sometime. But he was the saltiest guy ever, and he, he'd been in China in the '30s, and he had a medal there for I don't know, some Yangtze River duty or something, but he was an interesting guy. And then we had these guys who had, we had a guy by the name of Wright, who was a shipfitter, and he was forty-eight years old—

McIntosh: Oh my.

Butler: He was one of the first guys to get off the ship—

McIntosh: That's ancient.

Butler: We used to call him Pop.

McIntosh: Of course.

Butler: And he, he was an interesting guy from Philadelphia, and we had these guys that had been involved in the North African invasion, and then as I said, we had all these young guys, like myself. I was twenty years old while this was going on.

McIntosh: Quite a ride. Yeah, you were talking about the supplies, you had no trouble getting your supplies, your food supplies, you could always have a place where you get plenty, so you never ran out or were stretched.

Butler: No, we usually, the only time, when we carried troops was the only time

that the chow was lousy, when we got powdered eggs and everything. Soon as we got rid of the Army and Marine guys, we'd break out the fresh oranges and steaks and stuff like that. We used to load stuff from when we were down around New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, and it would be, we'd call it, it was terrible, Australian wooly beef. It was a stringy kind of meat, and then they had lamb they'd bring aboard, about every third lamb would go over the side when they were loading, because it was terrible.

- McIntosh: Every soldier and sailor that I've interviewed who was in that area was exposed to that Australian lamb, said that "We couldn't stand it," and after it was on the table once, nobody would eat it, and finally they just shoved it overboard.
- Butler: Yeah, well, even when they were loading it, they just, "Oops," hop over the side there.
- McIntosh: Right, once you knew what it was, yeah, that wasn't—
- Butler: When we got fresh eggs and stuff, that was really a treat.
- McIntosh: Of course you hid those because you didn't want to share those with any Army guys.
- Butler: Nope. When we crossed, became shellbacks and crossed the equator, we had a bunch of Marines on, and they had been across the equator. It was kind of fun, they took us apart really, but we wound up pouring mineral oil in their soup.
- McIntosh: Oh, that was in retribution?
- Butler: We got our retribution, and those guys were lined up to the john like you wouldn't believe. [both laugh] We got that from the sick bay.
- McIntosh: I'm sure. Your medical supplies, I didn't ask you about those, you had no trouble, you never ran out of any of that?
- Butler: No, not really. We'd go over for supplies, especially in Guam and places like that.
- McIntosh: The base hospital there—
- Butler: Yeah. Guam was a U.S. protectorate at one time. People were really, I don't know how they are, but they sure were pro-USA in those days.
- McIntosh: Well, they should be, we acquired them in the Spanish-American War.

Did you have to consult with the docs often, or have any on the beach?

Butler: And we had, every once in a while, we'd have an Army doctor with the troops on-board, which was a big help, since it took--one of my, guy who we call a striker was in sick bay, he was interested, and he was from Canisius College up in Buffalo. In fact, after the war, we used to go around after the war playing basketball in Japan against the Marines and he was good, he played basketball at Canisius and played against guys like Cousy and Easy Ed McCauley and all those Catholic universities. He had this terrible ear infection, and then he got a lot of help from an Army doctor who came aboard. We always welcomed them.

McIntosh: Sure. When you were carrying troops, was there ever any terrible, any epidemics, diarrhea or anything like that?

Butler: Nope.

McIntosh: You're lucky. There were problems sometimes.

Butler: But usually they weren't on there that long, I suppose.

McIntosh: I'm sure.

Butler: When we took the Marines off Guam, they were all pretty well beat up, some of them were burned, and we used to have to take care of those guys.

McIntosh: So they got into your sick hall then.

Butler: Yeah. We'd take care of any of those guys, if they didn't have any medical personnel of their own on there.

McIntosh: But essentially when you put fighting troops aboard, your only job, the ship's job was to feed them and cart them around. You didn't really—

Butler: If they had problems, we helped them. We used to befriend some of those soldiers, I can remember giving some guy, you know, I brought a hunting knife with me over there, I thought I'd be fighting Japs off the bow of the ship [laughs]; and he sharpened my, he used to sit there and sharpen his bayonet for hours and he sharpened my hunting knife. I gave him a huge bottle of vitamins to take with him for, I don't know if it was a lady or, I think it was a lady, in case he didn't eat too well over there. [both laugh] But we used to trade lots of stuff like that, everything was a scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. When I think of the cigarette prices now, they used to sell cigarettes on our ship for a nickel a pack, or give them away.

McIntosh: Right. The guy that ran the Red Cross aboard our ship is in charge of the Red Cross supplies, the Red Cross would supply gum, cigarettes, candy to the patients who had, but he was the chaplain. They had two chaplains, he was the Protestant chaplain, he was in charge of keeping track of all the Red Cross supplies, and I took a tattoo off him one time. So whenever I needed cigarettes, I just go down and take oh, four or five cartons and I'd distribute those among the other guys. They were just no problem, cigarettes were everywhere. They were just giving them away, they couldn't give them away fast enough, and they'd come in aboard ship in crates this square, just full of cartons of cigarettes. I mean there was so goddamn many cigarettes.

Butler: That's where I tried smoking, you know I wanted to be like the big boys—

McIntosh: Sure.

Butler: But it never stuck. [laughs]

McIntosh: Never became an embedded smoker?

Butler: No. There was a time when I first worked at the *State Journal* when I worked at night and I'd come home about 2:00 o'clock, and I'd have to sit on the edge of the bed and have two cigarettes to try to unwind a little bit. My wife had smoked since she was sixteen, and quit about eight years before she died. She said, "Why are you smoking two cigarettes a day?" And then I thought, "Geez, I am kind of punchy." So I quit, it didn't bother me. But she, I think St. Mary's had a thing up on Odana Road there where you could quit smoking, they'd help you quit smoking. Some kind of program.

McIntosh: Oh, a clinical program.

Butler: She went up there, by gosh she quit. She used to tell me, she went about eight years without smoking, we would go out to eat or something, there would be smoke around her, and she didn't think it smelled good. Actually she died of lung cancer, but the doctors say it was not—

McIntosh: Not that kind that you get from—

Butler: Actually, she had, it started as breast cancer. They didn't know that.

McIntosh: Oh, this was secondary lung cancer.

Butler: They kept saying “You’ve got lung cancer, but that’s not the source of the ailment,” they couldn’t find it. Then they found a tumor in her breast afterwards. He was the oncologist at the clinic, but he’s the guy that found what everybody was looking for. She lived for three years, had all kinds of chemo. It was in remission for a while, and then in ’94, the summer of ’94, they said about August, “You’re no longer in remission.” So they were gonna increase the chemo, and we went over to Dean Clinic in September, they were gonna try it. They set her down on a chair and said, “This is gonna take four hours.” I sat there for forty-five minutes with her and she says. “This is our shopping day. Why don’t you go grocery shopping and come back?” Well, I come back from unloading my groceries and I got the phone call from the nurse at the clinic. She said, “We can’t arouse your wife.”

McIntosh: Oh my.

Butler: She went into a coma, and the doctor said, what was his name, Michael, I know the guy, I can’t think of his name, he said, “She’s not gonna last the night.” I couldn’t believe it.

McIntosh: Boy, that was swift.

Butler: Although, they could not get a blood pressure on her before they started. I had to bathe her that morning and dress her, she was so weak she couldn’t-- but that happened, she deteriorated so fast about the last two weeks—

McIntosh: Wow, that’s fast.

Butler: Yeah. She had lots of problems. Actually she had five Caesarean sections.

McIntosh: Oh really.

Butler: A year before she died, she had been operated on for a stomach ulcer.

McIntosh: Wow. That’s more than one—

Butler: And she had a hysterectomy after our fifth child, so she had her share of problems.

McIntosh: Gosh, I’d say.

Butler: She was tough, though. I see all these people complaining today, she never complained once. She had to drag that little oxygen tank around and everything.

McIntosh: Amazing.

Butler: Thought she was gonna make it. Women are much tougher than men.

McIntosh: No question about that.

Butler: She put up with a lot.

McIntosh: Yeah, they always tolerate more.

Butler: They really do. I don't know how I would have been under the circumstance.

McIntosh: Most guys it bothers their ego if there's something wrong, where women
expect to be ill, and they expect to complain, they expect to hurt, men reject all that without thinking.

Butler: And never go to the doctor.

McIntosh: That's somebody else, it's not me. Probably that's what makes them
good soldiers, I think.

Butler: I really don't think, except for one bad eye, I really don't have any complaints except at seventy-five, you know, it's tough to get up in the morning and stuff like that. But I saw the other day a guy I knew at the state university, Bob Winter died, and I was born in May of '24, he was born in December '24, he died of Alzheimer's. I saw the obituary the other day. He was the head of all the state universities, a super guy. You know, he was such an intelligent man, and I can't imagine him with Alzheimer's.

McIntosh: Okay, let's get back to the war here. If you can bring your ship ashore
and land, how did you know what that beach was gonna be, the under side of that beach, does anyone have any information?

Butler: Well, I think when we went to Okinawa, they passed out these little pamphlets of all things that you might expect on the island, and they had, apparently they had pretty well chased the area around there—

McIntosh: So you knew what you were gonna be digging into on that ship.

Butler: Pretty well, although they didn't know it all, because we hit lots of

coral that I don't think they ever imagined.

McIntosh: Yeah, because like you say, it ripped the bottom right out of your ship.

Butler: And—[blank spot on tape]

McIntosh: Did they slow perceptibly or did they try to drive it in full tilt?

Butler: They tried to hit it as far as they could.

McIntosh: Full tilt, whatever speed that would be, which was about twelve knots.

Butler: Yeah, twelve or thirteen knots was about right.

McIntosh: But they would go in full bore with that.

Butler: Yup.

McIntosh: So they could ride as high as possible?

Butler: And then drop that stern anchor. That's what pulled them off.

McIntosh: Right, but the minute they tried to go in as deep as possible, is that right?

Butler: And then when the tide was out, we tried to come off when the tide was in, we used the stern anchor to pull us off.

McIntosh: Right. Did that work okay?

Butler: Not always. It might come off fish tail going in, but I think it was at Okinawa, we must have hit every ship in the harbor coming off. There were so many ships at Okinawa.

McIntosh: So crowded. I mean it was hard to bring it in without hitting someone.

Butler: It was hard coming off.

McIntosh: Oh, because of the fish tail.

Butler: Yeah.

McIntosh: Well, I had one guy who said that their anchor broke, I mean the chain broke, and they had some kind of a problem to get out, and they finally had another ship, threw them a line and pulled them out because otherwise they would never have gotten out.

Butler: Yeah, sometimes you get in too deep, and sometimes like even when the tide was out, that's why we had those pontoons, because you couldn't get close enough to the beach.

McIntosh: Ah. And then what would you put on the pontoons, whatever the gear which you're gonna unload?

Butler: Yeah, then the vehicles would come right off the bow, ramp, right on to the pontoons and get in that way.

McIntosh: So you kept the pontoons right at the very front of the ship for that purpose, if need be in other words.

Butler: And we left it there when we pulled off.

McIntosh: Oh, you didn't bring it back aboard?

Butler: No.

McIntosh: That's too much trouble, I suppose.

Butler: There was no way of getting them on.

McIntosh: But they were self propelled?

Butler: They had, oh no, they were just, you had to manually put those things in place. And then, see because when you put them on, it took an awful lot of, we had, they were kind of like hooks welded on the side of the ship, and these things hung on there. It took—

McIntosh: What, eight guys?

Butler: No, it took a crane to get these things in place. Once they were off, they were off.

McIntosh: Kinks, problems getting them off the ship?

Butler: Everything went off pretty well, the artillery pieces.

McIntosh: I've seen that perhaps sometime you might be in the water deeper than you planned.

Butler: No, I don't think we ever had any problem with that.

McIntosh: You were able to get everything off you had.

Butler: When you read about what went on in Normandy, that must have been hellish up there because they were—

McIntosh: They were shooting at them.

Butler: Dropping guys. I don't think at any invasion we had, did we have anybody shooting, well there was some, but not us. They'd be shooting at the LCTs, a tank loaded on. In fact, we took an LCT [Landing Craft Tank] from San Diego to Hawaii on top of the deck.

McIntosh: I was gonna say, it wouldn't fit inside that door.

Butler: And then we got the ballast like this and knocked it off.

McIntosh: Tipped it in.

Butler: It was just like, we took the railings off one side of the ship and it was just, and they went on, I suppose they were probably in Guam too by now.

McIntosh: That was pretty exciting doing it.

Butler: Yeah, when you're like this.

McIntosh: You wonder whether it'll keep in turn or not or right itself.

Butler: But it was—

McIntosh: Did you have a motor whale boat when you wanted to go somewhere?

Butler: We had Higgins boats, two Higgins boats on either side.

McIntosh: LCMs. [Landing Craft Mechanized]

Butler: Yeah. That's how we zoomed around in the harbors from ship to ship, run for supplies like that.

McIntosh: That's what I noticed most when we'd go to Japan, you know, for some R&R. And if we had to park out in the bay, like at Yokohama, we couldn't park near the shore. That's the way we got around.

Butler: We dropped one of those at Leyte to search for survivors from that one LST that was bombed. That guy, that coxswain, was put in for citation, I don't know if he ever got it or not, I think he did now, Tom Quinn.

McIntosh: Didn't your ship get a unit citation?

Butler: Well, they put him in for one, I don't know.

McIntosh: I would think with those landings they would award the ship with a unit citation.

Butler: Yeah. I know at one time I heard we were given these Bronze Stars for like the Philippine liberation. Three of those, but there should have been another one. No there were two of those, we were in Guam and Okinawa. We had three invasions, but that Mindoro one, which to us was the toughest one of all, but they didn't consider that a major invasion, I guess.

McIntosh: But the kamikaze took out a ship right next to yours—

Butler: Two ships. Plus on the way in, the Nashville was hit outside. That's when we first started, then of course they got worse as we got to Okinawa, but at Okinawa, we made several trips back to Okinawa, and the trips back were more perilous than the invasion because that's when the kamikazes were really coming down, although at that time, they were looking for the wagons[?] and the flat tops, they knocked off a couple of destroyers. They weren't worried about LSTs by that time.

McIntosh: No, no, they were worried about the picket ships.

Butler: But if they, like in Mindoro, if they caught you on the beach, that's what they would want.

McIntosh: Well, you were a sitting duck.

Butler: Yeah.

McIntosh: So, you were ashore there for a while unloading supplies, how many of the crew were involved in that, most everybody?

Butler: Well the deck crew was.

McIntosh: Yeah, I'm sure.

Butler: Of course the Army guys would have to, they'd do most of the unloading.

McIntosh: They would.

Butler: It was their equipment, and they knew what they had.

McIntosh: They were responsible to get it out of your ship.

Butler: Yeah, and really, except for directions and everything, they were responsible for loading it, cause they wanted to—

McIntosh: So they put it in the order that they want.

Butler: And our guys made sure it was secure, so they just weren't haphazardly loading that stuff on.

McIntosh: Yeah, I can see that's a problem. And what about explosives, did you carry any of those?

Butler: Unless the Army had them, no. And they had their own ordnance. They had artillery and stuff like that. But usually that's what we'd load on from the transports after we got those guys in.

McIntosh: What was the largest number of Army men you'd be carrying on the landings, maybe a hundred of them?

Butler: Oh yeah, there would be—

McIntosh: I was thinking about how you fed them all.

Butler: Well we fed them all like garbage, [laughs] you know, the powdered eggs and stuff like that, powdered milk.

McIntosh: Yeah, you didn't have to just pass out sea rations or that.

Butler: Nope. But we fed them, but we saved all the fresh stuff for—

McIntosh: The people that counted. [Butler laughs]

Butler: Maybe their sea rations and stuff looked good to them by the time they got off our ship.

McIntosh: How about mail?

Butler: Some of these logs that I got here, it was, you know we'd go for months without mail and some of the mentions are made of twenty bags of mail at one time. After Christmas of '44, I think I got, I think it was a couple months later, I got cookies from home, and it was just crumbs.

McIntosh: About that size, right.

Butler: My dad would write me only on my birthday, I think. My mother would write all the time. But my dad everyday would take the *State Journal* sports, tear it off, put it in an envelope, and send it. So when we got

twenty bags of mail I could be assured of a lot of reading material—

McIntosh: My mother did the exact same thing. I said, “I don’t care about the regular news, just give me the sports section.” [Butler laughs] You know, the major part of the sports section.

Butler: He did that, and he sent me the, he got me a subscription to the *Sporting News*, the overseas *Sporting News*. I used to get that, pass it around to some of the guys on the ship after I got through with it.

McIntosh: Yeah, I don’t remember, I wasn’t involved in that, I didn’t get that subscription, but I got the *State Journal*. The *Sporting News* I still carry it, that’s one subscription I keep.

Butler: Well my dad got me the *Sporting News* when I was in high school, and he kept up that subscription every birthday until he died, ’76 he died. Then when the Spink family sold their interest, and I see now that it’s been sold again, the *Sporting News*, just the same.

McIntosh: It was just unloaded by some, yeah I still take it, and I still enjoy it more than the other sports magazines. I don’t read them, but I read this. I gave up the *Sports Illustrated*, I didn’t like it after a while.

Butler: I still, one of my son-in-laws gets me a subscription every year, and to me it’s not as good as the old *Sporting News* used to be.

McIntosh: No. I think the *Sporting News* is far better than that.

Butler: And I used to, when they only had baseball I enjoyed, I used to love to read all those, you know, about the minor leagues and stuff I enjoyed.

McIntosh: When I was a kid, most kids were Cub fans, but I was a Cardinal fan. My folks used to live there, just before they moved to Madison, and so I used to listen to them, because both my mother and father were great sports fans. My mother took me to Chicago in 1933-or 4, and I watched Babe Ruth hit a homerun my first game, playing against the White Sox. So anyway, I heard about all the Cardinals and the Browns, of course. Wherever they lived, some of the Browns lived in the same apartment building, so my ears were filled with St. Louis baseball.

Butler: Well actually, the first World Series I remember was the Gashouse Gang, and I became a Cardinal fan then.

McIntosh: Right, that’s what did it.

Butler: I think I was sick and home from school listening to the radio to the

Gashouse Gang, but actually I was more of a White Sox fan than a Cub fan because of my dad, who was a big White Sox fan.

McIntosh: Oh really. Most people in this area are Cub fans.

Butler: I know, but he was, his dad, my grandfather was a railroad man, and they got free tickets to Chicago, and this was the era of, in the early part of the twentieth century when the White Sox were pretty good.

McIntosh: Well they were big.

Butler: Yeah, and he was a fan—

McIntosh: At least up until 1918.

Butler: Yeah [James laughs], and he'd love to go down. They'd go down free on a pass, they'd go down and watch the White Sox. He became a big Ty Cobb fan watching him for the White Sox. He used to just be on, you know like you say, the Cub fans are abound around here. He had a bowling alley out on Atwood Avenue, he always had a picture, and just a grapple of Cub fans and Luke Appling behind the bar. [both laugh]

McIntosh: Right. I always remember he was so good at fouling the ball off. You could never strike him out.

Butler: And I became a Nellie Fox fan and guys like that. I remember driving through Pennsylvania, and I don't know where he was from, but it was a little town, and they had a big, kind of an amateurish looking sign that said, "The Home of Nellie Fox."

McIntosh: Oh my. [End of Tape 1, Side B] So, did you use your G.I. Bill?

Butler: Yup. I went to the university on the G.I. Bill.

McIntosh: Back to the university.

Butler: Yup.

McIntosh: Finished there.

Butler: Finished there. In fact, my class is celebrating the fiftieth. I graduated in January of 1950, and in June of '49, I got married, so the last semester I was married. Then I went to, I got out in January of '50, got a job at the newspaper in Stevens Point.

McIntosh: That was your first newspaper experience?

Butler: Yeah, and I was just a general assignment reporter up there, and the sports editor left, and they gave me the job, and it was actually, it was very interesting because John Roberts was the football coach at the high school up there—

McIntosh: Oh, I know him.

Butler: And John Erickson was the basketball coach, his first job out of Beloit College. And they had great sports up in Stevens Point at that time. The principal up there, his name was, gee, my Alzheimer's is starting, Bostad, Alan Bostad, and he and my uncle had played here at Madison High School, and they went to Whitewater together, played football down there, and he was the principal up there, and I got to know him real well--

McIntosh: Sure.

Butler: And it was a bonus that he and my uncle had been boyhood friends. Then I went down and worked for Bill Horde for a year down in Fort Atkinson, and then Nate McCormick hired me. It's funny, they give psychological tests and everything now when they hire people. He hired me in a booth in a hotel, Park Hotel bar, one Saturday afternoon [laughs], that's where he interviewed me.

McIntosh: You gotta go?

Butler: I got a parking meter down that's probably gonna run out pretty soon.

McIntosh: Alright, well I've run out of questions.

Butler: Well that's good, yup.

McIntosh: Thank you.

Butler: I hope you get something out of this.

McIntosh: Oh yeah. I'll make a copy of this.

Butler: Now, did you talk to Charlie Larkin—

[End of Interview]