

**Samuel J. Butler**  
**Narrator**

**Wayne Clark and Mark Russett**  
**New York State Military Museum**  
**Interviewers**

**Interviewed on July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2003**  
**Woodstock, New York**

**Samuel J. Butler**     **SB**  
**Mike Russett**        **MR**  
**Wayne Clark**        **WC**

**MR:** What was your educational background prior to entering the service?

**SB:** I went to school in Harlem. And then we moved up to Inwood, which is a few blocks from the A-line station<sup>1</sup> at 207<sup>th</sup> Street. I went to George Washington High School at 192<sup>nd</sup> Street in Washington Heights and graduated from there. That was my education.

**MR:** Could you tell me where you were and what you recall about your feelings when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

**SB:** Yes, I was in a movie at the time. And we came out of the movie and we found out Pearl Harbor had been bombed. We were so surprised because we didn't think anyone would attack us before war was declared. Since they had peace negotiations going on between Japan and this country at that time. We thought it was a terrible act to attack us in what we considered peacetime. And we surprised that everybody wasn't prepared at all on Sunday morning.

**MR:** Did you enlist or were you drafted?

**SB:** I was drafted. I was deferred because two other brothers of mine were already in the service. One was up in Greenland and the other eventually went to France. One was in the Air Corps and the other was in the Army. And they deferred me because I was a chief moneymaker, to put it that way, for my mother since my father wasn't working during the Depression. So they deferred me until 1942, which was a year later. On December 7<sup>th</sup> I received the notice to report on January 7<sup>th</sup> for induction. I went to Fort Dix in New Jersey for my basic.

**MR:** Did you just have to standard basic?

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<sup>1</sup> Train station.

**SB:** Yes, standard basic. And then they gave you evaluation tests. They evaluated me as a clerk and I went down to Camp Lee in Virginia, near Petersburg. I think it's Fort Lee now. I went to clerk school there. The only interesting thing that happened there was after I got out of the school. I was on KP<sup>2</sup> and while we were washing dishes, a dish broke in the water. And being a smart aleck who just came out of clerk school, I said, "I read that this is to be considered 'wear and tear' if it breaks in the hot water without anybody dropping it or anything. So the sergeant there, the mess sergeant, said, "Fine Sam, you don't have to pay for it." All it would have been was fifty cents, but I had to be a smart aleck.

I was appointed to KP for three nights and for guard duty for three days. That was the reason why, after my basic training was done and they offered me a job in the outfit, I could have stayed home and taught what they called the 'hillbillies' how to point the guns. I would have been in Fort Lee for the remainder of my service probably! But I was so mad at the outfit that I took my chances and went overseas. After we left there we went to Camp Shandaken, which is near Pittsburgh<sup>3</sup>, for re-evaluation. And they put teeth in my mouth because I didn't have the four points that you're supposed to have for eating for the army. So they had to put some false teeth in which were completely worthless. Anyway, we went down to Newport News<sup>4</sup> when the evaluation was finished and they decided what outfit you were to go into.

We went down as the POE<sup>5</sup>, and I was surprised that it was like a prison. You had the walls all around it with guards walking around. We were fighting for freedom, but to get onto the boat you between lines of soldiers with machine guns. Well, not machine guns, but automatic weapons. The Mariposa was the boat. It was formerly an excursion<sup>6</sup> that went between San Francisco and Hawaii. All we had for protection was the plane overhead until we got out the 12 miles. Then because they figured it was a fast boat, we were not in a convoy, we were all by ourselves and just went as quickly as possible to Fort Lyautey, which is right near Casablanca (Morocco). And we landed there late in June of 1943. At that time the African Campaign<sup>7</sup> was winding down.

I remember I took a shower there. The companies were all stark naked of course, about 250-300 men. And you would get under the overhead pipes, they would blow a whistle, you wet yourself up, they blow a whistle again and you got out. You soaped yourself up, and then you went under again and got clean. I think the whole thing was done in six minutes! [Laughs] There was more beer than water available there!

**MR:** Now what kind of unit were you assigned to there?

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<sup>2</sup> "Kitchen Patrol," or "Kitchen Police." Included serving food and washing dishes.

<sup>3</sup> I couldn't find any military camp by that name. There is one called Camp Shenango in Northwestern Pennsylvania though.

<sup>4</sup> Independent city in Virginia.

<sup>5</sup> The only definition that I could find was "Point of Entry."

<sup>6</sup> A short journey or trip.

<sup>7</sup> The Axis powers were trying to prevent the Allies from obtaining oil.

**SB:** As I said, it was a Headquarters Company<sup>8</sup>. From there, we moved over to Palermo, Sicily following the invasion of Sicily. We were always just behind the front enough to get the battle stars for it, but we were never actually in combat. We were in Palermo, we were in Catania, and eventually after nine months we moved up to Naples, in Italy. We stayed there until August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1944.

The invasion of Southern France was made, and we came a couple of days later. They landed on August 15<sup>th</sup>, and we were there August 18<sup>th</sup> (1944). We landed in San Tropez, in Southern France. The advanced company, which I was part of at that time, was a small group of officers and enlisted men. There were eight of us together. We took a restaurant, L'Ami Fritz, which probably meant "friends of the Germans" in French<sup>9</sup>. So we took over that restaurant, and I ran it. That's when the Liberation was going on in Marseille<sup>10</sup>. There was fighting outside in the street when we were setting up the restaurant and the headquarters for the main group to come in. I ran that restaurant for 2 weeks until the main body came in and divided the officers into the restaurant and the enlisted men into the enlisted mess. At that time I was transferred to running a hotel.

**WC:** Did you have any problems getting supplies or food?

**SB:** That's what the idea was. We opened up the Port of Marseille and that's where the food and everything came in. So we didn't have any trouble. In fact, what we did, with the consent of the officers of course, is we exchanged army food for native French food because we were tired of it. That made the restaurant a very interesting place for the enlisted men. Because before we were living on sea rations, you know, canned food. And here we had the French chefs making rabbit, chicken, and all the fresh food for us, and we were giving them the sea rations for it.

**MR:** So you had French chefs?

**SB:** Yes, we had French chefs. One of the reasons they closed the restaurant was because the chefs had a cat that they allowed in the kitchen. And according to army law, you can't have a cat in the kitchen. They said, "Would you rather have a cat in the kitchen or mice in the kitchen?" But that's another story. [Laughs]

**MR:** How long did you run the hotel?

**SB:** I ran the hotel until we moved up to Lyon, where I ran another restaurant. Well, I didn't run the restaurant, I just told the French chefs what to cook for the American forces. I never did any cooking myself; I just kept them in line with army regulations.

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<sup>8</sup> The administrative aspect of the army.

<sup>9</sup> While Fritz is a German name, the actual French word for "Germans" is "Allemands."

<sup>10</sup> Also known as the Battle of Paris, the Liberation was the movement to free France of German control. It lasted from August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1944 until August 25<sup>th</sup>, 1944.

Then we wintered in Dijon, where I qualified for the Battle of the Bulge. But I was told that they were only taking those real “goof-offs” from the outfit because they wanted to hold its own membership as much as possible. I had been with the outfit from Casablanca, so they figured I was needed there and only sent the men they didn’t want to the Battle of the Bulge. Then we moved up to Nancy where we met up with the Seventh Army<sup>11</sup>. We ended up in Heidelberg after we were in Mannheim<sup>12</sup>, all before V Day,<sup>13</sup> which we celebrated in Heidelberg.

**MR:** In your interview form, I noticed that you met to very famous people.

**SB:** Oh yes! I was in charge of the VIP hotel. I interviewed Marlene Dietrich and Madeleine Carroll<sup>14</sup>. They came to entertain the troops. I met both of them personally.

**MR:** What was your reaction?

**SB:** They looked like they were over the hill and much past their prime. It was true in both cases. But they didn’t have the make up on when I met them, they were just ordinary people. They didn’t look like the glamorous stars that they were on the screen. Which is probably true with most of them. [Pauses] Marlene Dietrich I met in Germany, in Mannheim, and Madeleine Carroll in Dijon.

**MR:** How did the troops react to them?

**SB:** Oh they were glad to see them! I know Marlene Dietrich sang that song, “Waiting at the corner...” What’s that one? It’s a very famous German song.

**Someone in the background:** Lili Marlene.

**SB:** Lili Marlene! She sang that and got great cheers for it. I don’t remember what Madeleine Carroll did because I didn’t see the performance myself, but I did meet her when I booked her at the hotel.

**MR:** Were there any other famous people?

**SB:** Well, the only other famous person I met was General Leclerc<sup>15</sup>. The American troops did not take Marseille, the Free French took Marseille to boost their feelings. The population there took over the Port, and once the Americans had sealed off the corridor above them, the German troops were pushed ahead. So all they really had to do was

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<sup>11</sup> The first US field army to be in combat in World War II.

<sup>12</sup> Both German cities.

<sup>13</sup> Also called VE Day, or “Victory in Europe.”

<sup>14</sup> Marlene was a German actress and singer, and Madeleine was an English actress.

<sup>15</sup> The famed “Liberator of Paris” was a French General and war hero.

flush out Germans that were hiding in the hotels. In fact, our MPs<sup>16</sup> had to protect the Germans from getting lynched when they flushed them out of their hiding places.

**MR:** Were you aware of the concentration camps on your way through Europe?

**SB:** No, I never saw the concentration camps. I was aware of some of the poverty that these people went through. I know in Italy, Naples was very poor at that time. But I never saw any concentration camps.

**MR:** Did you see the same kind of poverty in France?

**SB:** Not as bad, it seemed that the French were collaborating more and they didn't seem to suffer as much. That was my feeling.

**MR:** When were you discharged?

**SB:** I was discharged on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1945, from Fort Dix in New Jersey. But we landed in Boston. I forget the Port there. The trip was terrible. We had an old Liberty ship<sup>17</sup> that was riding on top of the waves, and in November the water is rough coming across. The whole crew was in the latrine at the same time. And I felt fine until I went down there! [Laughs]

**MR:** Do you recall where you were and if you had any reaction to the death of President Roosevelt?

**SB:** No, I don't remember that at all. I do remember VE Day on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1945; we celebrated that a lot more. We only heard about it through the Yankee Paper, the Stars and Stripes.

**MR:** Where were you when you saw it?

**SB:** I told you before, Heidelberg Germany. We went back to Nice (France) for recreation, and then we were moved to Reims to process the troops through to Japan. And we were to go as the last group to Japan. Naturally, before we got scheduled to go, the atom bomb was dropped and the war was over.

**MR:** What was your reaction when you heard about that?

**SB:** Oh we were very glad! We felt sorry for the Japanese people, but we were very glad for ourselves. Because we had figured that if we got two weeks in this country before going to Japan we would have been lucky.

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<sup>16</sup> Military Police.

<sup>17</sup> World War II cargo ships.

I remember the reaction when I landed near Casablanca. I met soldiers who were through the African Campaign, and they said to me, "Give up any hopes of going back. We've got a little piece of Africa here, Hitler has all of Europe, and we have yet to conquer all of that yet. Do you really think you can make that and live through it?" And a lot of them had that attitude that you live for today because you're never going back home anyway.

**MR:** After you were discharged, did you make use of the GI Bill<sup>18</sup>?

**SB:** No I didn't, because I had a job waiting for me that I went back to before I lost it.

**MR:** So you never used the 52-20 clause<sup>19</sup> either?

**SB:** No I didn't.

**MR:** Did you join any Veteran's Organizations?

**SB:** Not until I got up here (Woodstock, NY). I was too busy making a living.

**MR:** What are you active in now?

**SB:** I'm active in the Woodstock VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars). I was a post commander for nine years. I'm now a senior vice commander.

[Picks up a hat that says "All-State Team, 1998-1999, Post Commanders]

**MR:** What did you get that hat for?

**SB:** For bringing in more veterans to be members in 1999.

**MR:** Did you keep in contact with anyone that you served with?

**SB:** Occasionally I got letters from them, but we never had a reunion. After all, we were a chair corps, and a chair corps doesn't have the same camaraderie as men who actually saw action. The nearest I was to the action was in Marseille. I landed there with the advanced company and set up the headquarters there in the restaurant, as I said before. And there was fighting in the streets, right in front of me. I could look out the window and see the armored vehicles of the Germans and the French fighting. But I myself never went into any combat.

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<sup>18</sup> A law that provided benefits for veterans of World War II, such as paying for college, high school, or vocational school tuition.

<sup>19</sup> Another provision like the GI Bill that allowed all servicemen to receive \$20 a week for 52 weeks while they looked for a job.

**MR:** You have a photograph of yourself, would you show us that please?

**SB:** Sure!

[Holds up a photo with an arrow pointing to a young man amongst other soldiers]

**MR:** Where was that photo taken and when?

**SB:** That was taken in Reims in 1945 before we broke up.

**MR:** Thank you. And you had some other things you wanted to show?

**SB:** Yes.

[Holds up a framed diploma, written in French]

This is the Diploma I received from the Republic of France for the time we spent there during the Liberation. I was there for the Liberating Parade in Marseille. I especially remember the naked women. [Everyone laughs] Well they made the women who had collaborated with the Germans march naked.

**MR:** Oh, really? Did they shave their heads too?

**SB:** Yes, and their pubic hair.

**MR:** And they paraded them through town like that?

**SB:** Yes, as a disgrace. Of course we never knew whether the stories were true, if they really were collaborators or if they took their neighbors word for it. But I remember that part. And we didn't join the parade. We were just observers because the French took over. I think Paris was liberated the same way by the French to make them feel better.

**MR:** How do you think your military time changed or affected your life?

**SB:** I don't know. It gave me a better feeling about the country itself. I didn't like going into the service, but once I got in it I enjoyed most of my time there. And for me it wasn't too bad because, as I said, I didn't kill anybody and nobody actually shot at me personally. Looking back now, it was a pleasant experience because I saw places I would never have seen otherwise. Of course it wasn't under the conditions I would have enjoyed, but it was a change from the everyday, run-of-the-mill that I experienced otherwise.

