

**Interviewee:** Charlie Butler  
**Interviewer:** Phyllis Boeddinghaus  
**Date:** March 11, 1997  
**Transcriber:** Janena Benjamin

*This tape contains an oral history done under the auspices of the Metuchen Edison Historical Society. Today's date is Tuesday, March 11, 1997 and Charlie Butler is being interviewed by Phyllis Boeddinghaus at the Metuchen Senior Citizen Center on Center Street in Metuchen.*

P. Boeddinghaus: Good morning Charlie and thank you so much for coming this morning to chat with me and do an oral history. It's going to be very informal. Let's start with your genealogy. You already mentioned to me that you were born in Metuchen.

**C. Butler:** Yes I was born in Metuchen at 292 Central Avenue, that's the corner of Central Avenue and Main. But part of my family was born in New Jersey and part of my family was born in Florida. My father died in 1941, May the 12<sup>th</sup>, was much older than my mother. In those days you know, my mother was married when she was 15 years old and my father was much older. It was such a coincidence; I was telling a friend of mine that my father used to live in Rosewood, Florida where they had the movie out now called *Rosewood*. When I was a child around nine and ten years old my father was a Mason and people used to come into the house and do the handshake and I was a little kid and used to watch them and my father used to tell me how in 1923 there was a bad riot in Rosewood. My brother Marion, who is my oldest brother, was born in Florida and he'll be 82 years old April the 17<sup>th</sup>. My brother Marion can remember my mother hiding him, my sister Thelma, my sister Adelaide, and my brother Ekker in the well from the riot and the Klan and everything. And if you see this movie, it tells you. Its out in the theater now called *Rosewood*. It's a little town; it was a little black community in Florida that was overrun by the whites in 1923. Because of it the movement started. I told my brother about it and he was very upset because the movie wasn't really true to what happened but it did tell a story. I remember my father always telling that he was a Mason and he was saved by some white Masons that hid him in a horse and buggy and took them out to another town in Florida and they made their way to Jacksonville and from there my family came up to Newark.

P. Boeddinghaus: So you're saying that's the Masonic order, the Lodge and there are two groups, the black group and the white group?

**C. Butler:** Right now they are more together.

P. Boeddinghaus: Integrated?

**C. Butler:** **Yes they are but in other states they --- is this still on? (tape)**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, do you want it off?

**C. Butler:** **No, I'll tell it like it is.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes.

**C. Butler:** **In other states, in fact in 13 or 14 states, black and white Masons are together. We are bound together. They visit our lodge and we visit their lodge. In fact in my lodge, Bethany Lodge in Newark we have white brothers. There are white members. We don't call them members we call them brothers. That's when you're all brothers. Color has nothing to do with it. We are brothers. I hate to say it that New Jersey still has that racist mentality and there are the white lodges and the black lodges. I don't blame it on the white lodge, I don't blame it on the black lodge but I think one day they may get together. And what makes it so ridiculous is we all read out of the same book, the same ceremony, the same words, the same passwords; everything the same.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Can you see if it's going around? I just want to make sure I get all this. *(referring to tape)*

**C. Butler:** **So Masonry leaves a lot to be desired in New Jersey. Now I can go to a little state like Connecticut and I can go into the white lodges and they come into my lodges. And Philadelphia, you know. So it's just New Jersey has yet recognize that Prince Hall is an authentic Masonic group. I'm a Prince Hall Mason.**

P. Boeddinghaus: So then your father was saved by a Mason?

**C. Butler:** **My father, who was a Mason, was also saved by a white Mason in the South. And if you see this movie you will see a lot of Masonry in this movie, you know. Masonry is the oldest fraternity I guess there is. It goes back to King Solomon.**

P. Boeddinghaus: I know Jack's father was very active in the Masonic and in the Shriners.

**C. Butler:** **I'm very active myself.**

P. Boeddinghaus: You've always mentioned that to me when we talked, yes.

- C. Butler:** I enjoy it.
- P. Boeddinghaus: So then your parents migrated north?
- C. Butler:** My parents came up to Newark and then they moved to Metuchen. And my family has been in Metuchen, well I was born here and I'll be 66 April the 4<sup>th</sup> and they were here before then, so my parents were at least 70-75 years in Metuchen.
- P. Boeddinghaus: What did your father do for a living?
- C. Butler:** My father was always sick I remember my father was much older than my mother and he was always sick. But my mother did day's work. She worked for a family on Middlesex Avenue called Miss Brown. I used to remember Miss Brown, Mr. & Mrs. Brown, a real nice family. And she also worked on Main Street at a Chinese laundry called Lee On Ching Hand Laundry. My mother worked there.
- P. Boeddinghaus: Was her name Sunny?
- C. Butler:** No, Parthenia. My mother's name was Parthenia, like the actress.
- P. Boeddinghaus: You had mentioned that you cut grass?
- C. Butler:** I cut grass all over Metuchen, I cut grass, delivered groceries, delivered ice before people who are rich now and got refrigerators, those same people used to have iceboxes. And I used to deliver their ice when I was 9 and 10 years old. And I used to work at Costa's Ice Cream Company right here on Pearl Street. Costa's had the best ice cream in New Jersey and we used to sell ice. I used to sell ice with my brother Marion who also worked there. My brother worked the night shift and I used to come down and stay with him, you know. Sometimes he would bring us ice cream home and we'd be so cold because at the time we didn't have a refrigerator and we couldn't keep the ice cream. We couldn't save it so we had to eat it. So we'd get up at 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning and eat ice cream. It was part of growing up that the kids nowadays will never, never experience. Children today have so much given to them that they are missing out, missing out on so much. Things I have experienced they will never experience. I had a friend of mine I remember, I had a sister who worked for a family, I think it was Lester's, but anyway he gave me an electric train and I took the electric train home but I couldn't use because we didn't have electric at that time. I'd used to just push it around the track and push it around the track.

P. Boeddinghaus: Make believe.

**C. Butler:** **Make believe. When you don't have television your mind works more. Television destroys the mind because it does everything for you. When you have a radio you can put your mind to work. Because what you hear, like the Shadow, the Green Hornet, the Lone Ranger, you can put that in your mind and you can make it anything you want to make it and your mind is constantly working. In the fifteen minutes that that program is on your mind is working. And fifteen minutes that's on the TV, you're laying there sleeping or just looking at something. It means nothing.**

P. Boeddinghaus: So did you have a happy childhood growing up in Metuchen?

**C. Butler:** **Oh, of course I did. I had six sisters and two brothers. And number one, I never, never in my life heard my mother and father say one curse word or have one argument, never, never. I never heard my father use profanity. I never seen my mother and father argue. I was the youngest of nine and I never seen that. We had a close family. I only have one sister left out of six but we had a beautiful family and I had a beautiful childhood. I can say now, you know, we were poor. I can say we were poor. But I tell you this, back in the 1930's a lot of people were poor, believe me. You know we had to go down to the relief. Now that's called welfare, then they called it relief. See now they give you money, in those days they used to give you food. My brother-in-law used to go to town and go behind the stores and get the boxes and use them for wood. And get the old fruit you know and get the vegetables. Go behind Dessel's and get some of that fruit they used to put out for us and we'd go to the bakery, there used to be a bakery on Hillside Avenue and Main Street, and we used to get the day old, they used to have boxes of day old cakes and bread. It was beautiful you know.**

P. Boeddinghaus: And then your mother would make something out of it.

**C. Butler:** **And then we lived on Durham Avenue and there was the Eosso's. There was Tommy Eosso on one side and Pat on the other side. My mother would cook rolls on Sunday and my mother would give them hot rolls and they would give us spaghetti and milk or things that were left over. We would exchange food like that. It was truly a neighborhood. We lived in a neighborhood. I don't know if you call it a neighborhood now. Some people don't even know their neighbors and live together ten or fifteen years.**

P. Boeddinghaus: That's true. So then did you go to Franklin School?

**C. Butler:** I went to Franklin School from kindergarten. I had a beautiful teacher named Miss Wittenberg who I think about so often. She lived right down the street there where Wayne Street comes in on Middlesex Avenue. She lived on Middlesex Avenue next to Pearl Street.

P. Boeddinghaus: I remember the house.

**C. Butler:** Miss Wittenberg, she had beautiful white hair and she was so sweet to me. I always remember Miss Wittenberg; she always used to give me extra graham crackers and extra milk. Miss Wittenberg, that was my kindergarten teacher and I'll never forget her.

P. Boeddinghaus: So you went through the school system?

**C. Butler:** I went from kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade right in Franklin School. I graduated in 1949. And then most of my buddies I remember in 1949 they joined the Marine Corps. I had a good friend of mine that I played football with, Tommy Peake, Lester Riggetts, they joined the Marine Corps and then when the Korean War broke out I joined Navy. My friend Tommy Peake was killed, he had a twin sister named Marilyn Peake, we all went to school together.

P. Boeddinghaus: So that was when, in the 1950s?

**C. Butler:** The Korean War came in June 1950 and he was killed. Tommy and I played football together, were in the same class, the same graduating class. He lived Menlo, in the Clara Barton section. At that time, Clara Barton and Potter's Crossing and Newmarket, they all came to Metuchen.

P. Boeddinghaus: Right. I lived in Clara Barton and I came in to Metuchen by bus.

**C. Butler:** When Tommy got killed I went to the Navy. Back before then I used to hang out at the YMCA and Mr. Harry Williams was director of the Y and I was boxing and he talked me into going to the Golden Gloves. So in 1950 I went into the New Jersey Golden Gloves and I went to the finals and I lost the decision in the finals to a fellow from New Brunswick named Dennis Cronin. We were novices you know, just beginners. And then next year I went in the Golden Gloves again and I fought the same fellow in finals and I beat him this time. And then I went to New York City to fight the Eastern championship from Florida to Massachusetts. We all had a big tournament and I did very well in that tournament, I had a

lot of knockouts and I fought in the finals in Madison Square Garden, we fought twice in one night. I remember the semi-finals when I knocked this fellow out, I looked down and saw some of my Metuchen friends, remember Bill Sheehy used to have the sweet shop –God rest his soul he’s passed away now. But Bill Sheehy and Frank Larky, Bobby Heroy and some of the other fellows had come to Madison Square Garden when I was fighting the Golden Gloves. I lost to a very unpopular decision at that time. I thought I won the fight, a lot of people did but I lost it. And we went to Bear Mountain to train and I was working at the time at Freeman Motor Services, the trucking company at the parking facility, and I really couldn’t afford to leave and to take the time off, two weeks up in Bear Mountain to train. So anyway, Mr. Stockel, you know Mr. Stockel?

P. Boeddinghaus: John Stockel.

C. Butler: John Stockel, Senior, he was a heck of a man. He approached me and gave me an envelope with some money in it and I could afford to take the two weeks off. And I trained and he flew me to Chicago and after that I went into the service and I kept fighting. First of all they put us on a ship and took us out and I went to sea but then I started fighting. Then you’d win one district, you’d win another district and I got temporary duty to Maryland and I won a tournament and I won the All-Navy in San Diego, California. There’s a big tournament they have, the East fights the West and I won the All-Navy. Then they trained us, they took all the service fighters to Annapolis where we trained with Spike Webb and trained for the Olympics, for the 1952 Olympics. I fought up in Albany, New York. which I won that tournament. They took us out to... we fought in the finals out in Kansas City, Missouri. We stayed in Kansas City Kansas, but we fought in Kansas City, Missouri. And I fought about four times and I fought twice in one night and I fought another Navy guy that I had beat twice previously. And I beat him but I broke my hand on his head. But I had to fight again, I had to fight a fellow named Truck Spieser and he beat me. He beat me and they had to stop the fight, you know, I couldn’t finish it.

P. Boeddinghaus: Because you were injured.

C. Butler: And I lost my big chance for going the Olympics. Had I won that fight I would have been in the ’52 Olympics and I couldn’t even go as an alternate because I had a cast on my hand and I was still in the Navy.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh yes.

**C. Butler:** So they flew me back to Maryland. We were down in Annapolis, you know, and I had some friends of mine there. They were Marines, they had been to Korea. There was a black fellow named Jesse Barber who was a good fighter, he was also a light heavyweight; he had got wounded in Korea and frost bitten. So one day all of us guys we wanted to go to a movie in Annapolis. We went to town to go into the movie and they wouldn't let us in unless we sat upstairs. So Jesse and all these guys had been in the military and in combat and we were very upset that we come back to our own country and couldn't go to a movie. So we went back to the academy. At that time the academy had all black stewards, you very seldom saw a black military officer, you know, a cadet. And you to make it so unbelievable, my son graduated from the military academy. He was in the honor company in 1983 and he's a lieutenant commander now. And I think it's a first for Metuchen - two brothers' sons graduated from military academies. My brother Ekker, his son graduated from West Point in 1977 and he is a lieutenant colonel and my son graduated from Annapolis in 1983 and he's a lieutenant commander. I think that is a first for Metuchen for brothers' children to graduate from the military academies.

P. Boeddinghaus: Just a little quick p.s. Mr. Harry Williams is still living. I deliver Meals on Wheels to him on Mondays in Redfield Village.

**C. Butler:** You don't have his phone number do you?

P. Boeddinghaus: No but I know his address; I could look it up to you, at Redfield Village.

**C. Butler:** I appreciate it. I'd like to call him. Because Mr. Williams and I were very close at the time when I was fighting. He traveled with me to Europe and he stayed with me all the way, Mr. Williams, he is a good man.

P. Boeddinghaus: He still smokes his pipe.

**C. Butler:** Still comb his hair over trying to hide the bald part?

P. Boeddinghaus: Right.

**C. Butler:** Maybe he doesn't have any hair to cover over.

P. Boeddinghaus: So you traveled all over with the boxing and with the Navy?

- C. Butler:** Oh yes. When I was in the Navy we traveled in the Admiral's plane. In 1954 we fought for the President at Quantico, Virginia. I got President Eisenhower's autograph, I got Vice President Nixon's autograph, I got Secretary of Defense Charles E. Lewis, I got Admiral Radford, Admiral Carney, Admiral Fletcher, General Lewis, he was a Marine Corp Commandant, and I got those. In fact I was offered some money for them.
- P. Boeddinghaus: They are probably more meaningful to you.
- C. Butler:** I still have them. It was nice. I met some friends of mine who I hadn't seen, well I talked to them by telephone, but who I hadn't seen since about 1952 when we used to fight. One's in Springfield, Mass and I met to Jesse Barber when I went to Acapulco Mexico on vacation. I was walking out of the elevator and we bumped into each other. He did 20 years in the Marine Corps and then he retired.
- P. Boeddinghaus: When did you retire from the Navy?
- C. Butler:** I got out of the Navy in 1955. Then I fought professional and had one professional fight but I had a family. I was married and I had a family. My manager, my trainer he took a third of my purse and it wasn't that much money so I went back to my job. I went back to my job.
- P. Boeddinghaus: Which was what at that time?
- C. Butler:** Freeman Motorcycles, I had that done before I went. Then I took the test of New York City Police Department, then I took the State Police, then I took Department of Corrections in Metuchen and I had problems with Metuchen at the time. You know, some racial problems. I was born in Metuchen and I was promised a job but they didn't give it to me, there were some bad problems in Metuchen. Metuchen is a nice town but it had racial problems that people don't know about. That you won't know about it if you're not black. If you're white you say this is a beautiful town. But if you're black you felt the racial tension that was here. When the chief tells another officer, "As long as I'm chief, I'm never going to have a nigger on the police force", you know there is a problem. That's what another officer told me who was white and is not on the force any more. And believe me, he kept his word because I didn't get the job and three times I took the test and three times I came out - once I came out top and once I came out one two and three. And they hired above me and below me for no reason because I was in perfect condition. I didn't drink, I didn't smoke, I never smoked a cigarette in my life,

never did drugs, never got in trouble, had a good conduct from the military. I was born in this town and knew everybody. But I always remember when I went for an interview a question Eddie Leis asked me. It was so ridiculous. He asked me, "Butler, if we let you in the force and you stay for a while, would you let yourself get fat"?

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh. (gasp)

**C. Butler:** What kind of question is that to ask a man? I wouldn't even answer it. I wouldn't even entertain it. Am I fat? I go to the YMCA three days a week to work out. So I knew then and there I wasn't getting the job. So when Dr. Brancole, he's a psychologist who used to live on Middlesex Avenue, Dr. Brancole, God bless his soul he was a good friend. He said, "Charlie," and he gave me a note, "Take this note to Rahway Prison. They need officers." He gave me the note and I went to Rahway Prison and they took my fingerprints and they hired me. They hired me and the pay wasn't much at the time. And then in fact the pay scale started to go up, up, up. Right now we're about the third highest paid law enforcement department in New Jersey. And I stayed there for thirty years. I made sergeant and I made some great friends there and I thanked Dr. Brancole. He has since passed away but he was a good man and he got me into that law enforcement job at Rahway Prison. Now I'm retired.

P. Boeddinghaus: Just backing you up a minute. To do that law enforcement, did you have to take classes?

**C. Butler:** I had to go to the academy. We went to an academy. It wasn't a main academy like it is now, now they have an academy where you have to go for four months and you really got to learn the law. When I first went into the Rahway Prison we weren't allowed to carry guns off duty. We were law enforcement officers but we weren't allowed to carry guns. Then after a while, I stayed there for about ten years, then they passed a law where we could carry weapons and had State Police powers. Now when they did that then we had to go to school and go to the range and learn how to fire a gun and we had go to the school and learn the law. That's what they're going now. But in the beginning it was just...

P. Boeddinghaus: You were more like a guard.

**C. Butler:** Just a guard. In fact we were in a department called the Department of the institutions and Agencies. Then after we got our title as Correction Officers we went to another title as

Department of Corrections and they gave us uniforms. We all had the same uniforms. Before all we had was shirts and pants and everybody wore a different coat, overcoat. Now they gave us uniform allowance and the pay is good. When I retired in 1993 as a sergeant I was making about \$56,000 per year plus overtime. I could make all the overtime. I could go up to \$70,000 if I really wanted to with overtime. At Rahway Prison they give the officers fifteen sick days a year plus if you get hurt on the job you get paid while you're off. There are always fights and officers get hurt, get hit with hot water or hot coffee and there were always officers getting hurt. If an officer is gone, he's got to be replaced. Mess hall, it takes eight officers to run mess hall, I cannot run it with seven, I cannot run it with six. That's the law. Eight. If mess is held up for an hour because of that one man, I got to hold up because if something happens and somebody gets hurt and there is a supervisor, they're going to ask me why I ran mess shorthanded. So actually there is eight men but you still got to remember there are about 350 inmates so if they want to take over, they're can take over. The only advantage we have is that we know that help is always on the way. There's always help coming. Years ago we always had the State Police to back us up. Now we have our own assigned unit. We have our own special unit for that.

P. Boeddinghaus: Rahway is maximum security?

**C. Butler:** Rahway is maximum security. But there are minimum security prisons around Rahway. In fact there is a Rahway Camp and that is minimum security. But basically Rahway is a medium to maximum security prison.

P. Boeddinghaus: I'm very naïve about all this.

**C. Butler:** Trenton is the worst prison. Trenton is where they have the bad, incorrigibles, you know, doing 100 years or 75 years.

P. Boeddinghaus: What was that like for you to go to work everyday? Did you feel frightened?

**C. Butler:** Oh no. I had been in the military; I had worked in the prison in the military so it didn't bother me. In 1971 I was detached to the State Police. The State Police, they had a bad escape at one of our prisons. Five murders had escaped and the State Police didn't have enough black troopers to go to the neighborhoods like in Jersey City and Newark. So they got five black correctional officers and we were assigned to the State Police and we worked with them, with two troopers, and we caught all five. But I just stayed there with the State

**Police for approximately two years. I just stayed there with them and it was quite a learning experience.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Did you entertain the thoughts of staying with them permanently?

**C. Butler: No I couldn't, I was just temporary duty from the Department of Corrections. But it was a learning experience.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. And you caught all five prisoners.

**C. Butler: The last guy we caught was Alfred Ravelle. They called him Alfred "Casanova" Ravelle. He was the originator of cutting heads off. He was one of the first Black Muslims that believed in cutting off heads. He said he believed if you cut a man's head off he couldn't reach Mecca. And he had killed about twelve people. He was on death row twice and he escaped and we looked for him in Newark. My buddy and I and the State Police were together for a while looking. And finally a friend of mine got shot – John from Newark, a police officer who was working in Newark. He got information that his girlfriend was babysitting and actually when we went there he was there and two other fellows. When the officer from Newark walked in Ravelle shot him, shot him in the chest. The bullet went right through and stuck in his collarbone and he still has it. The trooper shot Ravelle in the hand but he never dropped the gun, he went out the window and went over the roof and escaped. Then they really put a hunt on for him. And they got his girlfriend's sister. They questioned her and she told them where he was at. He was in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. So we went down there, Lt. Bill Miller and some of the troopers and myself. We got traveling orders and we went down there. I know Lt. Miller told the Pennsylvania Lieutenant where this guy was and how dangerous he was but the Pennsylvania State Trooper wouldn't let us participate; he told us to stay in the background and that he would handle it. While we were going by this house another trooper ran out of the house cause I could see he was playing with two little boys. And he ran out of the house and he got into the car and then he went inside the house and put a bulletproof vest on and they got on the bullhorn and told him to come out and threw some tear gas in there. Then he walked in there – I think it was two troopers from Pennsylvania that went in there - and we heard a gunshot and they started dragging him out. And Ravelle shot the trooper, shot him in the head with a shotgun in the back of the neck and the bullet came out – shot him in the neck and the bullet came out the back of his head. I have those pictures. It was a terrible thing. I mean they proceeded to find Alfred and killed him and I had to ID the**

body because I used to work with him but it was unnecessary because had he listened to Lt. Miller it wouldn't have happened. The fellow that got killed was the same trooper that was playing with the two little boys; he was off-duty and he volunteered to go in.

But I remember Ravenelle, he was up in "Ad-Seg". It's a place in Rahway Prison on the fourth deck called Administrative Segregation. That's where you put your worst prisoners. You separate them. In the morning this half will go out in the yard and in the afternoon this half will go out in the yard. And every time they go out you have to strip, frisk them and search them. When they come in, you strip, frisk them and search them. And there were about ten people in this half and if they knew that Ravenelle was going to go out in the yard, they wouldn't go. They were all afraid of him because he had killed so many people and how much time can they give him? He had double life and the electric chair they had knocked that down so everybody was afraid, all the inmates were afraid of him. We used to talk at nighttime. I was the third shift and the inmates would call you names and he would yell, "Don't talk that way to Mr. Butler." They would shut up. They would shut up. And one day I was looking at him before he escaped and he said, "You know what, Mr. Butler? You're the right color but you're on the wrong side. When I get out, you know you got to go." And I said, "Well, Rav, when you get out, I'll be here." And I was the one who looked down on him to ID him. I must have counted a hundred bullet holes in him. He was a cold-blooded man.

P. Boeddinghaus: I wonder what makes a person turn out that way.

**C. Butler:** I have no idea what makes a person so cold-blooded and kill so heartless, to cut a man's head off and think nothing of it.

P. Boeddinghaus: I'm sure you could tell a lot of bizarre stories about working in the prison.

**C. Butler:** Oh yes. I could talk all year.

P. Boeddinghaus: I just finished reading a book called *Spencerville*. It took place in Ohio and a lot of stuff came out in that book. I was interested because my daughter lives in Ohio and every town they mentioned I could relate to it. But just what you are saying, this police chief was very bizarre. It was sadistic.

**C. Butler:** I just came back from Ohio.

P. Boeddinghaus: Did you? Where were you?

- C. Butler:** I went with the Shriners. I was in Columbus, Akron. Akron was cold, that's on Lake Erie. It was cold! Then I went to Cleveland and went to Youngstown, we stayed there a long time, about nine days. I had a good time.
- P. Boeddinghaus: My daughter is more to the western side, toward Indiana. Her husband is a teacher and a part-time farmer. It's a very nice laid back life, nice family and so on. So let's talk about some historical moments like where were you on Pearl Harbor Day. What were you doing when that news came through?
- C. Butler:** I was a little kid and lived on Weston Street and I remember them talking about the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. I didn't know where Pearl Harbor was. I can't say you know – how old was I? Eleven or ten? It didn't hit me until my brother Ekker went into the service. When my brother Ekker went into the service he was drafted and he left the house and he never entered that house back until three years later. He never came home on leave or nothing. When he finished his training he was shipped out and never got a leave.
- And we used to always play, and make guns and "I'm an American soldier" and kill Japs, you know how it was.
- P. Boeddinghaus: I guess for us as kids that was so remote.
- C. Butler:** To be honest with you, when North Korea invaded South Korea I didn't know where exactly that was. I knew it was somewhere in the east but I didn't know where it was or what it was all about. But I'll tell you what, I did find out about it after a while. But at the time it happened I didn't know too much about the location.
- P. Boeddinghaus: So when you were in the service was that during the Korean conflict then?
- C. Butler:** Yes. Korean conflict. I remember during the Second World War we used to make butter. We used get this white stuff and get this little dye and break the dye and mix it up. My sister used to do that, my sister Anne. She's dead now, God rest her soul. I remember as a little kid, she would mix that up and make butter or margarine. I can remember as a kid we ate fatback and fry it. I never had a steak until I was in the military.
- P. Boeddinghaus: And all the things we had to deal with.

- C. Butler:** I don't know if the kids could deal with the things we dealt with.
- P. Boeddinghaus: Sugar and coffee shortages and coupons and rationing and gasoline. .
- C. Butler:** I remember I ate a lot of ice cream, Costa's ice cream. I used to go down to the ice cream factory with my brother Marion. He would dip down and get the cream and get that good cream you know. I remember Sol Costa and Joel Costa. I would do favors for them and they would give me some money. I would go out on the truck and jump inside to get the ice cream for the drivers and they would give me money.
- P. Boeddinghaus: That was a big part of Metuchen, the Costa ice cream.
- C. Butler:** Oh, high-quality ice cream, good ice cream.
- P. Boeddinghaus: I worked in the chocolate shop after school for John Kalkanis
- C. Butler:** Do you know my brother Ekker? He worked there in the chocolate shop, maybe before you though.
- P. Boeddinghaus: He's older.
- C. Butler:** He's older. Ekker is about 73 or 74. But he worked there and helped make chocolate with John Kalkanis.
- P. Boeddinghaus: He kept that very secret the way he did the chocolate. We kids that worked for him could clean up afterwards but he never let us watch him or observe how he did it.
- C. Butler:** Mr. Kalkanis.
- P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. I think his wife is still living. She might be in a nursing home.
- C. Butler:** I went to school with his son.
- P. Boeddinghaus: His son Teddy. In other interviews that I've done, people speak so highly of the quality of the ice cream in the ice cream shop.
- C. Butler:** That's right. That was Costa's ice cream and he made that beautiful good chocolate. I remember that. My brother used to bring some home after work.
- P. Boeddinghaus: We talked about the Korean War.
- C. Butler:** Remember Frank Zeminio, the mailman?

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh yes.

**C. Butler:** **I used to play with his son. In fact, the first time I went to Coney Island I think he took me, him and his wife and my sister and his son.**

P. Boeddinghaus: I still see the wife Emma at the Savings Bank occasionally. I think she's still on Lake Avenue.

**C. Butler** **No kidding? I know Frank was working at a telephone company in Mount Holly.**

P. Boeddinghaus: The son?

**C, Butler:** **The son yes.**

P. Boeddinghaus: What some highlights that come to mind that you were impressed with? One thing I'll mention is that gas explosion in Edison about two years ago. Where were you when that took place?

**C. Butler:** **I was probably in Perth Amboy at the time but I saw the sky all lit up. But the one explosion I really remember, I was coming down the Parkway and I was on my way to duty and the Bayway refinery exploded. Do you remember that?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes.

**C. Butler:** **To tell you the truth my car shook on the Parkway and I thought it was a bomb. I thought it was a bomb the way the sky lit up and the way that mushroom came. But the Edison explosion I didn't see because I was in bed and I only got a little glare. My apartment was away from it so I didn't see it.**

**When I was a kid I was always afraid of fires, house fires, you know. I seen so many houses in Metuchen get burned. I was afraid my house was going to catch on fire. It did too.**

P. Boeddinghaus: I guess the way people heated their homes with kerosene and kerosene lamps.

**C. Butler:** **It was dangerous. But you know the thing that bothers me. I lived on Weston Street and Weston Street is a short street, its only about 200 yards long. And we all had wells, we all dug wells. My father he dug a well; most of them were just wells, dug wells. And I know that I counted over sixteen people on that little street that died of cancer after Gulton's moved in. That place used to be a public service building, do you remember, by the railroad tracks? That was a public service building. They had a guy there that used to cut the grass and**

he kept that place immaculate. It was beautiful. And then Gulton's moved in and they made those watches with the radio that used to shine at night and all that and I know a couple of women there who died of cancer. I know we used to go swimming in the creek. They killed all the fish. They didn't have the Environment Protection. Gulton's killed all the fish and we couldn't go swimming in the pool and we couldn't go fishing in the pool. And I do believe in my heart that he poisoned those wells.

P. Boeddinghaus: With the toxic waste or whatever.

**C. Butler:** **A street, one block, sixteen people or more die of cancer?**

P. Boeddinghaus: I think that property is still contaminated.

**C. Butler:** **Years ago that would have been investigated – I mean not years ago - now, now it would have been investigated. Years ago they had no environment program.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Over there in Edison too, that chemical insecticide corporation, they were guilty of toxic waste going into the streams. And it was proven and now that site has been cleaned up.

**C. Butler:** **Young Cecil Jackson he lived down there and he died of cancer. He was my neighbor on my street and he died of cancer. Judy Johnson, a young girl, beautiful girl, she died of cancer; and three of my sisters, my mother and my neighbors. If they kill the fish, it can kill humans. If it got into the water and the water is shot and you drink it, eventually it's going to get to you.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Let's see, what other topic can we pursue? Do you have any other interesting stories? I talked to Roger Johnson.

**C. Butler:** **Roger and I were in the Navy together. Roger was on the ship right across from me in Norfolk. Roger was on the USS O'Riley. It was a submarine tender. And I was on the USS Jarvis, DD799, which was a destroyer. And we were tied up to a Sierra, which was an AD18 and I had temporary duty aboard the Sierra. And one day I was getting off my ship and I meet Roger Johnson. Oh what a beautiful feeling. And then one day I'm walking down the pier and this destroyer - I don't know the name of it - it was coming in the pier and I looked up and I saw Dick Fenton. Dick Fenton and I went to school together. You know Dick Fenton, his father lived on Middlesex Avenue. We went to school together right from here. And in fact he was bringing the ship in, the destroyer. We hug each other and everything and everyone wanted to**

**know, “That’s an officer!” you know. But hey, we were friends, Dick and I and Roger, we were walking up the pier together. It’s a good feeling to see somebody from home.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh definitely. On Roger’s tape he mentioned knowing you and about the boxing.

**C. Butler: Yes, Roger. We met and saw each other in the service.**

P. Boeddinghaus: It’s a small world. So now that you’re retired I have the feeling that you’re still active in the Masonic Lodge.

**C. Butler: And my church.**

P. Boeddinghaus: What church do you attend?

**C. Butler: The old Baptist church. I go there to the 8 o’clock service and now that I’m retired I visit the sick and I visit the widows in the nursing homes and take people to the airport and help the people with rides. We have a sick list in my church so I try to visit them.**

**I’m not working – they offered me a job for \$52,000 a year, the State did.**

P. Boeddinghaus: To do what?

**C. Butler: They have halfway houses that are run by civilians but they are going to take state prisoners and they wanted people who had worked in a supervisory capacity. But I turned it down. I turned it down.**

P. Boeddinghaus: You enjoy setting up your own schedule?

**C. Butler: I go to the YMCA maybe three days a week.**

P. Boeddinghaus: To work out. You’re upstairs using the equipment or you’re downstairs?

**C. Butler: Upstairs on cardiovascular. I’ll tell you what happened. I had a bad pain in my foot and I was working in Newark Prison at the time, Newark State Prison. And oh what a pain I used to have in my foot. And I went to this doctor and he kept telling me I had bursitis and he was giving me lotion and laprisone and all type of junk and it just wasn’t getting any better. So I changed doctors and I went to Dr. Weisfolk, right here off of Middlesex Avenue. So he sent me to Dr. Lombardi.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Robert or Joseph?

**C. Butler:** Brothers, they both are doctors. They gave me an MRI and I had a tumor in my foot. I mean this had gone on for two years. He said I was very lucky. I was in the hospital for eleven days and so they removed that out of my foot. I used to go to do the grocery shopping and I would ride around and ride around until I could find a parking space close because of my foot. And now I don't care whether I park a mile away. I love to walk because I remember when I couldn't and how painful it was, you wouldn't believe it.

P. Boeddinghaus: Dragging your foot around.

**C. Butler:** My doctor he gave me a stress test because he's a new doctor and he gave me a stress test you know. And he called me back and he told me he didn't like what he saw. He saw these dark shadows. He said your heart isn't getting enough blood so he said he wants to do catherization with the dye you know. So I went to Robert Wood Johnson Hospital and did a catherization and he showed me I had two blocked arteries. So he said he's going to give me an angioplasty. He said it's basically the same thing. So I said okay and I went to work the day I had to go to the hospital. I worked because it was Dr. King's birthday and I'd get time and a half.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, January.

**C. Butler:** So I'd make the overtime and then go to the hospital and I'd be out the next day. So I thought. So I went to the hospital and the next day we went up for the angioplasty and he explained to me it was just a balloon you know. I said sure. So while he was doing this about 9 o'clock I fell asleep. And I woke up it was about a quarter to twelve. I said, "Doc, aren't you finished yet?" He said, "No, Mr. Butler, we have a little problem." So he showed me the screen. He said, "You see this screen here; you see that little spot there?" He said, "That's a blood clot and I can't get it." I said, "You mean to tell me I have to come back!" He said, "No, you got to go up for immediate surgery." I said, "What! What's my option?" He said, "You could go home but you're going to have a massive stroke or a massive heart." I said, "Where's the paper." I signed it and the next thing I remember I was waking up and I couldn't talk and I couldn't move my hands. And I said, "Oh my god, I must have had a stroke and I'm paralyzed." The nurse said, "No, no, Mr. Butler, your hands are tied and there is a tube down your throat." She untied my hands and I could write to my sister and my girlfriend was there at the time and that was it you know. I remember the doctor came over and I said, "Well, I didn't have time to even

call for my minister to come so I just said my prayer. I just asked my God to bless me for my strength and forgive me for my weaknesses.” No sense in making promises under duress that you’re not going to keep, which is already known by God whether you’re going to keep them or not. So I just asked him to bless me for my strength and forgive me for my weaknesses. Because if anybody’s ever been in the hospital and been unconscious, actually to you that’s death. And then you get another chance to come back. Cause if I hadn’t woke up, I would never had known it and had another chance. That’s what life is. Life is taking your chances, doing what you can. Me, I don’t hold no grudge, I try to be nice to people. The town has some bad memories but I don’t dwell on it. I got some good friends in this town, excellent friends, white and black. I don’t check a friend by his color, I check a friend by the way he treats me and the way we get along and the kind of person he is. I have some good Masonic friends, white and black. I have Masonic brothers right here from Mount Zion. I think I was the first black Mason in that lodge, Mount Zion Lodge. I was the first black Prince Hall Mason. You probably don’t know who Prince Hall is.

P. Boeddinghaus: No, I don’t know the terminologies.

**C. Butler:** Prince Hall was the name of a man. He was a free black man from Barbados. At that time in the 1700s the whites would not let a black man become a Mason. So Prince Hall was a free black man. At the time they were fighting the Revolutionary War. So he was raised as a Mason – that’s a term they use, to be raised or to be initiated by a Mason - by the British soldiers from England. They raised him as a Mason. He became a Mason. The first black Mason but he had no authority so he went to England to the Grand Lodge and petitioned the Grand Lodge for a charter so he could hold funerals and initiations. And he came back and he started the Africa Lodge, 459. Then when he died, they took the name of Prince Hall. They say you are of Prince Hall now. And that’s when black Masons started. We’re from the same Grand Lodge in England and we have the same books as the white Lodge right here in New Jersey. And yet they don’t want to recognize us and we go back just as far as they do.

P. Boeddinghaus: Jack’s dad was very active in the Masonic and enjoyed it very much, Scottish rite and Shriners in Trenton and traveled back and forth.

**C. Butler:** Clinton Avenue.

P. Boeddinghaus: I used to do a lot of typing for them and different projects.

- C. Butler:** I never joined the Shriners. They called that the party house.
- P. Boeddinghaus: It seems to me there were a lot of dinners and dancing.
- C. Butler:** They do a lot of good but they do a lot of... I was hanging with the Shriners when I went to Ohio. They move. They do a lot of good but they move a lot. I'm what you call a Blue House Mason.
- P. Boeddinghaus: What's that mean?
- C. Butler:** The Blue House is when you first come in. The first house that you come into in the Lodge, that's what they call it, the Blue House.
- P. Boeddinghaus: Well you've seen a lot of changes around Metuchen.
- C. Butler:** I remember when Durham Avenue was blacktopped. Durham Avenue used to be a dirt road, sand. We lived at 301 Durham Avenue and I woke up one morning and I was a kid and I looked and I see maybe 50 or 60 trucks all lined up and down the road and these scrapers and they scraped Durham Avenue and they blacktopped it. We used to play baseball on Durham Avenue. When we was kids we could play baseball.
- P. Boeddinghaus: On the street?
- C. Butler:** On the street.
- P. Boeddinghaus: Is your house still there?
- C. Butler:** The house I lived in is not there but it's another house at that 301 address. The house on Central Avenue is there, 292, but they have fixed it up.
- P. Boeddinghaus: I think I mentioned to you on the telephone that I had listened to the oral history of Gardena Emanuel.
- C. Butler:** Mrs. Emanuel, she's in my church. I used to go down and set with her and talk. Set with her and talk. In fact, her brother just died.
- P. Boeddinghaus: You had mentioned that you went to that funeral. That was her brother. And some of the other people that have done oral histories are Perry Letsinger.
- C. Butler:** Mr. Letsinger, yes he passed away.

P. Boeddinghaus: And Walter Qualls. He was very controversial in Metuchen. He was Council. You see this was started in the 70's. It was a more formal program about doing oral histories and that's some of the ones in the past that I'm speaking of. But I listened to them and I got an idea that I could do it, talk to people and continue the program on an informal basis for posterity.

**C. Butler: I was hoping you could go see this movie.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Rosebud.

**C. Butler: Rosewood. It's a little town in Florida, Rosewood. You see my father, there was a lot of Masonry in there and my father was saved by a white Mason in that town.**

P. Boeddinghaus: What was you father's profession when he worked? I know you said he was sickly.

**C. Butler: He was a general worker. His name was Marion like my brother Marion. You know my brother Marion? He used to play harmonica and guitar. He graduated with Tony Yelencsics.**

P. Boeddinghaus: You see I'm really from New Brunswick and I came over this way in 1945 and I came in town to Metuchen High School. But then we knew Tony when he was a customer at the flower shop and Jack bought a couple of cars from him.

**C. Butler: Everybody knew Tony. Tony helped my son get his appointment to the Naval Academy.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Tell me about that.

**C. Butler: I had a little problem with my son's guidance counselor.**

P. Boeddinghaus: That sounds familiar.

**C. Butler: My son went to Monmouth Regional High School and he was on the National Honor Society and his guidance counselor wanted him to take a general course. So I had to go down there and straighten him out and I told him never to talk to my son again. Never. I'll guide my son. And my son knew what he wanted to be. He wanted to be an Air Force pilot. He wanted to fly. He wanted to go to the Naval Academy. So this congressman at the time in Monmouth County, he has since died, but my son and I tried to see him but he was always too busy for us, always too busy. So I called Tony and I went down one Saturday morning and brought my son's**

**SATs and everything and Honor Society certificate and Tony was so impressed he got on the phone and he called Washington, DC. What's the fellow in Washington DC from New Jersey back in the 80s?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Patten, Ed Patten?

**C. Butler:** Yes, he talked to him right on the phone. And Mr. Patten said, "Well you know Tony it's too late to get him in the Academy right now. This should have been in. I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll send him to the Navy Preparatory School up in Newport, Rhode Island. If he does well in there, its only ten months, he'll go into the next class at the Academy, he'll just go right in." So that's where my son went, he went to the Naval Academy Preparatory School. There was a General down at Fort Monmouth. You see my ex-wife married a soldier from Fort Monmouth and that's where they lived, at Fort Monmouth. And she worked there with the General. In fact he talked to me, I went down to see him in his office - oh man, what a beautiful office - and he wanted my son to go to West Point. He said he would vouch for my son but my son didn't want to go to West Point. My son had won all honors in state football and wrestling and he wanted to go to Naval Academy. So he went to the Naval Preparatory School and he graduated with honors and he went right into the Naval Academy and he graduated in the honor 19<sup>th</sup> Company, which was the honor company, in the class of '83. And he put five years in nuclear subs.

P. Boeddinghaus: Was he up in Connecticut then?

**C. Butler:** No, in San Diego. And I went out to San Diego and I went out on a dependent's cruise, on the submarine that took the families out, 460 feet under the water. We were out for eight hours and we had a nice time. And he worked for this admiral and he got out of the subs and he went to a Naval Preparatory School in Monterrey and he got his Master's in Oceanography and Radiology. Then he got transferred to Navy Intelligence. He was up in Bosnia, he was in Desert Storm with the Navy and he got a commercial award too, I meant to bring that. Then he was in Budapest, he was all over. Now he's transferred on the USS Constellation on the admiral's staff, a flagship aircraft carrier, CB64.

P. Boeddinghaus: Where's it out of?

**C. Butler:** Out of San Diego. He's a west coast sailor. I told him, "Why don't you go down to Norfolk like I was?" He said, "No Dad, I'm a west coast sailor." He likes the weather; he's a west

**coast sailor. So in September the carrier is going to be in Hawaii and I'm going to fly to Hawaii and they're going to take the family back on the carrier from Hawaii to San Diego. So that's a nice cruise and I'm looking forward to it.**

P. Boeddinghaus: You have just the one child?

**C. Butler: I have another son. He was in the Army. He's down in Jacksonville, Florida. In fact when my son called me last week he had stopped in Jacksonville, he was with his brother, they were out together. And I have a daughter Leslie. I'm a grandfather. I have three grandchildren, two girls and a boy.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Are they in this area, can you get to see them?

**C. Butler: Oh I get to see them, oh yes. I'm going down to Florida to see my son soon in Jacksonville. My son Chris is driving from Florida to San Diego. He did it before.**

P. Boeddinghaus: It's a long trip.

**C. Butler: He takes him time. He wants to make commander and in order to make commander he has to have more sea duty.**

P. Boeddinghaus: So are you enjoying your retirement?

**C. Butler: Oh yes, I don't think I want to work anymore. I had opportunities to work. I work at little things here and there but to have a steady job, no never again.**

P. Boeddinghaus: To have more freedom. The work that you did, probably shift work that was very confining.

**C. Butler: I worked nights for ten years, third shift for ten years. I wouldn't want to do that again. Mondays and Tuesdays off, everybody having fun on the weekends and you're working with the prison inmates.**

P. Boeddinghaus: I really wish Jack would retire but he's still plugging away.

**C. Butler: Well he has a job he likes. It's not strenuous really and he's around the flowers, it's something he likes to do. Do you remember the fellow from Metuchen, the black guy who used to love flowers? What was his name?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Harry Jackson.

**C. Butler: Harry Jackson.**

- P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. I think of him often, he used to cut our lawn and weed and so forth and that was very tragic wasn't it.
- C. Butler: The inmate that killed him was in Rahway Prison. Something happened and they shipped him down to Trenton. Harry Jackson.**
- P. Boeddinghaus: He was such a nice man and so well liked.
- C. Butler: That was terrible. Walked into the bank and they shot him for nothing.**
- P. Boeddinghaus: Like our story is, he was working for us cutting the lawn and so forth and he would let the payment build up. Jack would say, "How much do I owe you?" He would say, "Let it go, I want it to build up and be a big lump sum." Well then that happened and we hadn't paid him and Jack really felt terrible about it. So he kind of figured it out how much we owed him and he took it to his widow. And she said that happened in so many cases. People came forward and paid the back salary for work that he had done. She had no idea. Because he didn't keep records or anything, it was the honor system.
- C. Butler: The house in Metuchen on Main Street right over by the Post Office, he used to keep those flowers beautiful. I don't know who lived there.**
- P. Boeddinghaus: Immediately next to the Post Office?
- C. Butler: It was on that street, on that side. I used to see him cutting grass and tending the flowers.**
- P. Boeddinghaus: That was very sad.
- C. Butler: Also I remember the High School. I went to high school with James Fielding. Did you know James Fielding?**
- P. Boeddinghaus: Roger Jackson spoke of him also.
- C. Butler: James Fielding at that time was the fastest high school runner in the United States and we went to school together. I was out for track and I knew I was fast. One day we were racing and this blur went by me and I said, "Wow, Jimmy can run." Such a nice guy. We would travel all over for track meets. I think his sister died first, Frances. Kidneys, you know. At the time they didn't have dialysis machines. They were twins and they had a chronic kidney disease. James got a scholarship to Georgetown University and that's where he died. Our track coach was Mr. Pete Wilson.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes.

**C. Butler:** He was our track coach and in fact he was with Jimmy when he died at Georgetown University. He said it was so sad because they had a big bonfire and they were all cheering for a football game and here one of the best athletes was dying in the hospital and nobody cared.

P. Boeddinghaus: What was his medical problem?

**C. Butler:** Kidney. Both of them had kidney problems.

P. Boeddinghaus: Kidney also. There are so many advances today with dialysis and treatment and so forth.

**C. Butler:** He was such a good guy. Right now when they have death in school they have counselors. We didn't have them. Right now I'm 66 years old and I still have a friend I think about, Charlie Frohm. He died and we were good friends. I always remember him being so frail and pale, always pale and frail. I was about 7 or 8 years old and I used to let him be around and I could protect him. Charlie Frohm. He wore knickerbockers and argyles, rolled stockings you know. If you walked and they rubbed together they'd make noise. Little Charlie Frohm. One day the teacher said, "Charlie Frohm is dead". He died and his father was a cop.

P. Boeddinghaus: The name is familiar now.

**C. Butler:** He had a sister named Ruth. I always remember that, Charlie Frohm. In those days we didn't have people explain to you about death you know. I just heard, "Charlie Frohm is dead." Now they have these counselors to explain it to you.

P. Boeddinghaus: Like grievance counselors.

**C. Butler:** Those four young girls you know that died in Brooklyn. They talk to the students about that. We didn't have that in school. I knew a young lady too named Lois Therkelson. We played in the band together and had a good time.

P. Boeddinghaus: What instrument did you play?

**C. Butler:** I played the drums, titter drums.

P. Boeddinghaus: She was a very pretty blonde girl who lived on Lake Avenue and her father was a plumber. What was the problem there, she was younger.

- C. Butler:** I think it was an aneurysm or something. She was such a happy go lucky girl, I remember in band you know. It was shocking. After you get into the military that becomes easier, not easier to handle, but you can handle it better.
- P. Boeddinghaus: So let's sum up.
- C. Butler:** I can remember when Dr. King was killed because Dr. King was killed on my birthday.
- P. Boeddinghaus: Oh, in January. No wait – his birthday was in January.
- C. Butler:** Dr. King killed April 4<sup>th</sup>. My birthday is April 4<sup>th</sup>, the same day my sister died. My sister Eileen died on my birthday.
- P. Boeddinghaus: You're good about dates.
- C. Butler:** President Kennedy, when he died I was working up at Freeman's up on the tracks and we were unloading a railroad car, some cans from Dupont, when the president was killed. When Senator Kennedy was killed I was on the parkway coming down from Passaic. It was a beautiful day out, a beautiful morning. When Malcolm X was killed I was in New York over my sister's.
- P. Boeddinghaus: That was on a Sunday. I remember that because Jack went into New York for a boat show.
- C. Butler:** A Sunday, that's right. I was right down about three or four blocks away.
- P. Boeddinghaus: By the way, I saw that play in New Brunswick, *The Meeting*. And that was a fictional meeting between Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. It was very interesting the way it was portrayed. It was very intense, a very intense play.
- C. Butler:** I lived in New York for a while, a very short time. But I came back to the country. The country's pretty much always been my home. Good and bad. I remember I was in uniform and a bunch of us sailors were going Maryland out to Norfolk. There were four blacks and myself, five blacks on the bus. This was in 1950. We were going down to Norfolk to meet our ship and we stopped at a Howard Johnson Restaurant in Virginia. We all got out to go eat and I seen them whispering. They wouldn't serve us; they put us downstairs in the basement. It was so dirty down there with the rats so we went out to the bus and they served us on the end of the bus. I never felt racism like that until I went down South. In

Washington DC I couldn't eat right in the nation's Capitol, in uniform and they wouldn't serve me.

When I was in California and I was talking to my son, he was with some of his buddies, officers you know, and I was telling them. They said, "Mr. Butler, what about your experience in the Navy?" I said, "Let me tell you something, I loved this country but it didn't love me. When that flag went up I stand at attention, this was my country and I loved it. But it treated me like an unfaithful woman. It was unfaithful to me. I loved it, I never stopped loving it but it didn't love me. Now all the love that I didn't get is given to my son. He's trying to make it up to me by giving it to my son. My son was in the Naval Academy, my son is an officer and a gentleman, my son got his Masters in Oceanography and Radiology, my son travels around the world. Everything that he couldn't give me, he's trying to make it up through my son. But when I was coming up, when I was in the military it was just like being married to an unfaithful woman. Somebody you love, love, love, but they don't love you." They said that's a very good way of putting it, they were very good men these officers and they understood what I was talking about. I never hated this country because it treated me this way. I never hated it; I did everything that was required of me in the military. Everything that was required of me I did but my country was untrue to me.

P. Boeddinghaus: Do you think strides have been made in the past twenty years?

**C. Butler:** Oh yes. Young kids today they try to blame it on the system. They are so full of crap because if you go to school and get an education, nobody can stop you. Years ago they could, no doubt about it. Education didn't mean anything. If they didn't want to hire you they didn't hire you. Now you can do it. Because they're stretched out on drugs, you can't blame them for society, they're on drugs because they want to be on drugs. My son isn't on drugs; a lot of boys aren't on drugs. My son knew what he wanted to be.

P. Boeddinghaus: And you supported him morally.

**C. Butler:** That's right. Wherever my son went he took God with him. God is still in his life. God has never left my son's life. God never left me when I was in the service. I took him in the service with me and I brought him home with me.

P. Boeddinghaus: And that was through your parents?

**C. Butler:** My parents, through my parents. My mother, my father, my sisters and my brothers, and my church. My minister talked to me before I went in the service, the old Baptist Church, Reverend Hagley. He talked to me and I never forgot, you know. I've never let God out of my life. I might have forgotten him at times but he never forgot me. That's what kids today are forgetting. They have nothing to lean on if things get tough, they have nothing to lean on. They don't have any mothers, they don't have any fathers, they don't have any religion. They're lost. Kids are lost. We lost a whole generation to drugs. Gone. You know, rap music? What is rap music? It's trash.

P. Boeddinghaus: What do you think of the Ebonics?

**C. Butler:** Ebonics! Let me tell you something, English is hard enough. I don't know what the hell they're going to do about Ebonics. These young kids get on TV and they start saying, "You know what I'm saying?" "Yea, man." "You know what I'm saying?" I don't know who the hell is going to give a person a job talking like that. You got to talk with some sort of intelligence. I think that's just going to drop right out. How are they going to teach it? It's ridiculous.

P. Boeddinghaus: Where does it come from? Where does it originate?

**C. Butler:** I don't know. I was watching TV last night - a fight. They had a black fighter from England and he was English. He was a black from England and they had a white fighter from another country in Europe. So the announcer said, "Well, we have a Croatian and now we have an Afro American." I thought to myself, "This jerk, he's not Afro American. He's not an American. He's English. If he's African, he's Afro English. He's not Afro American." He never picked up his mistake. He kept saying it all night. He's English! To be an Afro American you've got to be an American. Got to be an American. People don't think about what's going on in this country.

I just live and let live, try to do what's right. Sometimes it's hard, you know, you might tip a guy. I don't want to get into a fight. I used to fight professionally and I always had a bad dream that I killed somebody with my fists. That always haunted me. I got hit in Rahway once. Well I hit in Rahway lots of times in fights and gangs. But this time it was one on one. He was a big guy and I stopped him a couple of years before I retired. I stopped him and asked him for some ID and he spit in my face and hit me and he broke my teeth.

- P. Boeddinghaus: This was in the prison?
- C. Butler:** **Right in the prison he broke my teeth. And he looked at me like I was supposed to fall or something. So anyway I hit him and I knocked him down and he fell between the wall and the desk and I lost it. My buddy, Randy Santo, who lives right in Metuchen, he's a lieutenant now, he grabbed me and said, "Charlie, you're going to kill him, you're going to kill him." I had lost it. But see you can defend yourself, if anybody hits you, you can defend yourself. But it comes to a point when you got to stop. So I'll walk away now, I walk away from somebody. In town if people holler or say things, I just walk away, I'm not getting involved.**
- P. Boeddinghaus: Because the boxing was more like a sport for you and then there is the other side of using those tactics to defend yourself.
- C. Butler:** **I used to teach boxing at the Y.**
- P. Boeddinghaus: Oh yes? They are doing great things at the Y with the expansion, aren't they?
- C. Butler:** **I have a lot of fun at the Y. I go there in the mornings and there's a nice crowd. The people who work there are very friendly and very helpful.**
- P. Boeddinghaus: I think they are doing great with carrying on the programs under all this duress of the construction.
- C. Butler:** **The construction hasn't interrupted our program at all.**
- P. Boeddinghaus: Terrific planning to be able to continue through all that.
- C. Butler.** **I enjoy my three days. I can go in there all day long as a member but I go there three days a week and I really enjoy it.**
- P. Boeddinghaus: They've made a lot of strides up there from what it used to be. Maybe you remember they used to have a Coed with the Saturdays nights in the 40s.
- C. Butler:** **Long time ago. With the bowling alley and that little pool.**
- P. Boeddinghaus: And that little pool, yes.
- C. Butler:** **You know Gus Thompson from Metuchen? He used to be the mailman. He helped raise me too. He was a good man, he was a Deacon in my church when I was a kid and started fighting and stuff.**

- P. Boeddinghaus: Since your father was older and sickly then you probably had other male role models.
- C. Butler: Oh yes, a lot of them. There was Marion, my brother Marion.**
- P. Boeddinghaus: Finish off that story then. The kids were hidden in the well?
- C. Butler: Hidden in the well. My brother knows this fellow's name, I've forgotten. They came by with a horse and buggy with hay in it and snuck them out. My brother knows the story of how they got to Jacksonville and then from there to Newark.**
- P. Boeddinghaus: That was like an Underground Railroad type of situation?
- C. Butler: Not really, at that time they were killing all the blacks and this Mason knew my father was a Mason and just went down and saved them. I was told a couple of my buddies about this – Rosewood - before this even came out. I was telling them five years ago about it and now they've made a movie out of it.**
- P. Boeddinghaus: I like movies, I'll have to look for that.
- C. Butler: It's true, it's something that really happened. And then they moved up here and some of my family was still down south.**
- P. Boeddinghaus: What brought them to Metuchen? You said they moved to Newark.
- C. Butler: Newark and then out here to Metuchen.**
- P. Boeddinghaus: What brought out here to the country?
- C. Butler: The country I guess, but you'll have to ask my mother because her sister stayed in Newark and my mother moved out here. And then my mother and father bought property on Weston Street and they built the house and used to have big picnics and used to roast pigs and everything. Everybody wanted to come down to the country; they called this the country.**
- P. Boeddinghaus: It was a gathering place.
- C. Butler: Yes, a gathering place for the family.**
- P. Boeddinghaus: Did they have cars or come by train or bus?
- C. Butler: Oh yes, they had cars. They all came to Weston Street and we had a good time, a very good time.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Well I think the time is just about up. And I really appreciate your cooperating and chatting and I love to hear all these stories. You say I can keep this?

**C. Butler: You can keep that paper if you want it – I don't know if you want it. Can they do anything with it?**

P. Boeddinghaus: I'll give it to the archivist.

-end-

*The background noises on this tape are a renovation project going on at the Senior Citizen Center installing a hydraulic partition. And that's the hammering and the electric saw noise that you hear in the background. P.B.*