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Fredericksburg, Virginia

Ruby Butler
Rosie the Riveter and the World War II American Home Front Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Kelsey Matthews
in October 2012

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Interview with Ruby Butler

Interviewer: Kelsey Matthews

Transcriber: Kelsey Matthews

[Interview #1: October 22, 2012]

1-00:00:00

Matthews: Today is October 22, 2012. I'm Kelsey Matthews here with Ruby Butler and we are going to be discussing her experiences on the home front during World War II. So, if you just want to state your name and date of birth please.

1-00:00:23

Butler: I'm Ruby Butler. And age...

1-00:00:24

Matthews: If you want to say what day you were born.

1-00:00:27

Butler: I was born July the 22nd, 1925, which was a long time ago.

1-00:00:37

Matthews: That's alright. So we can start maybe if you want to tell me about your family and where you lived.

1-00:00:44

Butler: Well, I've always lived in Richmond except for a few months during the war, I was away. I had one brother who was in the Navy during that time and I had a younger sister. My father passed away when I was 14 years old, so then it was just my mother and my brother and my sister and I. We later moved across the street from where we were and moved in with an aunt. My mother kept house while my aunt worked. So that's how we managed to get through my high school days.

1-00:01:24

Matthews: Do you remember when your mom first told you about the war? Did she ever say, we're entering into a war or did she ever say anything like that?

1-00:01:34

Butler: No, the first thing that I heard about the war was on a Sunday afternoon, a guest came in and he made mention that the President, we were at war. The bombing had occurred at Pearl Harbor. We had neighbors that had two sons in Pearl Harbor and of course we were very concerned about them. As it turned out later, they were alright. So, we were real glad. And then the next day when I went to high school, I remember we all went in to the assembly and listened to President Roosevelt declare war, he said we were at war. I don't remember all that he said but it was really serious for us to listen to him, to hear him say that.

1-00:02:28

Matthews: That must have been an amazing experience to hear the President and have that. So you lived in the same house for the whole war, except when you left?

1-00:02:44

Butler: Well, not the whole war, we lived there for a while and then my mother remarried and then we moved over to a section of town called Fairmount. We lived there a while and then we moved back over on Church Hill. It was back when we were on Church Hill that I got married, which was in 1943. But he

got inducted into the Army on Monday and we were married on Tuesday. I don't say we had a wedding, I say we just got married because we didn't have time to do anything else. And then in a week's time, he was gone. But that was the way it was with a lot of people during the war years. I was really young and he was young but it worked out.

1-00:03:38

Matthews: So did you get married at the courthouse then? Did you sign papers to get married or was it, did you ...

1-00:03:46

Butler: Yeah, we had blood tests made and we had done those the week before because we didn't know whether they were going to take him in the service or not. So we were prepared for either way but they did take him and of course my mother had to sign a paper saying that she gave her approval and his mother had to sign the paper saying that she approved.

1-00:04:16

Matthews: So you were saying that your mother was a stay at home mother during the war?

1-00:04:20

Butler: Yes.

1-00:04:22

Matthews: Did you work during the war?

1-00:04:25

Butler: After I finished high school. I finished high school in 1942, then I got a job, there was a [unintelligible]. One of my neighbors asked me if I wanted to go to work and I said yes. And I worked a half-day before I got an interview because they needed somebody so badly. And so I did work in an office downtown during that time. After we decided that I was going to go out to Texas where he was, I went out there and stayed three months and came back home. I got the same job back because they still needed somebody and then in March, I went to Louisiana and I stayed down there five months and came back. When I came back, I thought he was going to California but he didn't, he went to Europe. After his term in Europe, the war ended and he came home and we were real excited and thought, you know, this was it. But they shipped him to the Philippines and so it was really, I think, the war ended in August but he did not get home until March of the following year, March of '46, so all that time I still worked and stayed in Richmond. I had lots of girlfriends and we would stay for dinner downtown and go to a movie several times a week because, there was nothing else to do and nobody to go with you. But then it wasn't like you were afraid to go out like it is now. It was easy to just go out and I wasn't afraid to walk back home from the streetcar line, or the bus line to home or wherever we were going. But it was a trying, from the standpoint you lived from week to week to get a letter or some sort of correspondence to see that he was ok.

1-00:06:49

Matthews: I can't imagine feeling any of that because it seems so unreal without emails or cell phones, like how in the world did you stay in contact?

1-00:06:58

Butler: Just through letters, I wrote to him and he wrote to me. He had very bad handwriting and when he wrote to his sisters, they'd bring the letters to me and I'd read them because I knew how, what his handwriting looked like, which was nice that they did that. But everything just took weeks to get from one place to another. Even mail in the United States was difficult to get. You just waited and hoped when

you got home from work there would be a letter or something. Occasionally when he was out in California, he would call but the time difference meant he would call in the middle of the night or something like that. But it was trying, nerving at times especially when he was overseas, it wasn't too bad when he was in the United States. But, we managed.

1-00:08:01

Matthews: Can you tell me a little bit about what you knew about his job in the Army? What did he do?

1-00:08:08

Butler: He was an ambulance driver. And of course he was attached to an infantry company and so when they went forward, he stayed behind the lines to actually, if anybody got hurt, he put them in and then could carry them back to the station, you know, where they had set up for the medics. He talked very little about it. But when he was in Europe, he remembered and I remembered him saying that he could look across the field and see the Germans, that they were shooting at each other. Apparently, that was very nerve-wracking and then once he came back and went to the Philippines, the war had ended but there were Japanese snipers up in the mountains and so they would go out and try to get the Japanese out of the mountains until the war was over. He drove an ambulance and then if there were any problems, he brought them back. Mostly officers rode with him because there weren't many actually shoot 'ems and so forth. It was nerve-wracking. But he finally got out and got home, thank goodness.

1-00:09:41

Matthews: That's a great story to be able to tell. When you visited him in Texas for the three months, did you find a job there for a little while, or did you just...?

1-00:09:50

Butler: No, not in Texas. I got sick and had to have my appendix out while I was down there, so I didn't have to work or anything. I had to get over that before I could come home. But when I was in Louisiana, I did. I worked in a laundry, and the laundry did soldier's uniforms. We had to open them, you know, they came bundled up and we opened them up and put tags on them and they cleaned them and we hung them up on the rack. Then we'd send them back out to camp and that sort of thing. I went to work early because I lived a good ways from where the laundry was but I found somebody who'd give me a ride so I just rode in and had breakfast and went to work. But it was interesting.

1-00:10:56

Matthews: So you were in school when the war first broke out? You were in high school?

1-00:11:00

Butler: Yes.

1-00:11:02

Matthews: Do you remember practicing any, I know my grandma in her interview talked about, air raid drills

1-00:11:10

Butler: I don't remember doing that. I don't remember, maybe we did but, you know, my memory's clogged. But I don't remember doing anything, while I was at home during those years, but maybe we did.

1-00:11:30

Matthews: Did you have a favorite subject in school?

1-00:11:33

Butler: Yes. Bookkeeping and public speaking. They were my two favorites and they're the ones I did best in. As it turned out that when I really went to work after the war ended, I worked for the government and we did statistical work which was ideal for somebody that liked math and bookkeeping.

1-00:12:04

Matthews: Did you have a least favorite subject?

1-00:12:08

Butler: Not really. I was never that good at typing and shorthand, which they taught and I just never did real well with those two subjects. But I can hunt and peck and get by. I remember when I went to apply for a job with the Department of Labor. They asked me about typing and so forth and I told him if he gave me enough time and a big enough eraser, I could get it done. And he hired me. Course we didn't have white out in those days, but that was when I was first working.

1-00:13:02

Matthews: So where did you first meet your husband?

1-00:13:07

Butler: On the street corner. [laughs]. That sounds funny but you know they used to have grocery stores and so forth that had openings and the grocery store down the street from us opened and there were lots of people. You'd go in one door and go through the store and come out another one. And when I came out the other one, he was talking to some girls across the street. So, I walked over and I talked to him, and he walked me home and that was...I was probably fifteen at the time. But, he was a right cute fella.

1-00:13:45

Matthews: How old was he?

1-00:13:47

Butler: He was about eighteen months older than I am. But like I said, when we got married he was nineteen, had been nineteen two weeks, and I was seventeen so and they said it wouldn't last. And it only lasted fifty-nine years.

1-00:14:12

Matthews: You proved them all wrong.

1-00:14:14

Butler: [laughs] I proved them all wrong. Yeah.

1-00:14:19

Matthews: So how did you come to the conclusion that you were ready to get married?

1-00:14:27

Butler: I really don't know, but I just, there are certain things I think you know by instinct, that, that's right, it's the right time. But I do remember my mother asking me, she was very much concerned with the fact that he might get hurt, amputees and all that kind of stuff. And she did ask me that if he got sick, would I be willing to take care of him the rest of my life. And that gave pause to wonder, but I told her yes and she signed the papers. As it turned out, in the last years of his life, I did have to do it. But that wasn't because of the war. But he had Parkinson's and that's a dreadful disease to have that gets progressively worse over the years. Fortunately, he always hated the idea of going to a nursing home, but

he didn't, he never had to because he passed away before he got settled in the nursing home. But I'm glad that I was able to do that for him.

1-00:15:53

Matthews: It sounds like he was lucky to have you.

1-00:15:54

Butler: Well, he was an excellent patient, willing for you to do anything you tried to do for him to help him, he was willing to try it. Where so many people get belligerent and don't want to do anything but he never did. And that made it a lot easier to take care of him because the last three years that he lived, we did a feeding tube, four times a day for three years. The doctor said he never thought he'd live that long, but he did. But he was a funny person and still had lots of jokes and things that he could talk and think about. He never really talked a lot about the war though. I don't know except I think it was just painful memories. We did have one friend, he was really young when he went into the service and he was a Marine, he served in the Pacific and he would come to visit and they'd talk a lot about the war. But I didn't always stay around to listen to what they had to say. They both had bad experiences, you know.

1-00:17:33

Matthews: I can imagine so with him being an ambulance driver. Did he ever tell you about any of the sites he saw in Europe in his letters? Like you know how Europe's known for its architecture, where was he in Europe?

1-00:17:47

Butler: He went all the way through Europe up to Austria and when he was in Austria, that's when the war in Europe ended. He said Austria was probably the most beautiful country he'd ever seen. At a distance, somewhere along the way, he did see Hitler's house where he lived, but I don't know whether that was after the war or before he got back home again or not. But he came home and he stayed a month, and then he went to the Philippines and he was on a ship when the war ended with Japan. They didn't know what to do with him. The captain of the ship was running out of food but he had like 800 men or however many hundreds of men there were in the service, ship's crew. So they finally just put them out on the beach at Luzon. He stayed for three weeks until the government decided what they were going to do with him. That's when he stayed, you know, and tried to put up in the mountains because the Japanese knew the war was really over. So, that's the way it is.

1-00:19:11

Matthews: Did he ever send you pictures of any of the places? Did he have a way to do that?

1-00:19:15

Butler: Very few. Once in a while, I'd get a picture of him, maybe at camp with his fatigues but not very often. He just didn't have a camera. The really good picture that I have of him, with his uniform, Sarah has it; I don't have it. I gave it to her because she wanted it so badly. That was taken one time when he was home on leave, had his uniform on and his hat and everything. But after he passed away, which was ten years ago, a lot of his things, you know, I had given to Ray and to other people who I knew wanted them because they won't do me any good. He had a number of, he collected guns and that turns me off. In fact, he brought a gun back from Germany, with a bayonet on the end of it and he had taken that off, so we gave that to Ray. He had several guns that he had had; he gave them to his nephews and got rid of them so, cause I didn't want them in the house. Bugged me. But, he did bring home a stick pin, I don't know if you know what I'm talking about, men used to put in their ties, that had some stones in it and we found out there were two diamonds and a sapphire and we had those made into a ring. That was my last wedding ring that we had first put into that. Mostly everything else was trinkets and little things that he sent.

1-00:21:24

Matthews: So he just sent it through the mail? He would just send them back through the mail?

1-00:21:27

Butler: Yes. Except these things he brought home with him. He did send one thing through the mail, a little box that looked like a soldier's hat. It had a mirror on top and you could open it and put jewelry in it. That was right cute but I don't even remember what he sent that from but I'm sure it was in the United States somewhere.

1-00:22:00

Matthews: So when you were living in Richmond, because he wasn't around a lot, since he was serving, did you have a particular group that you liked to hang out with? Did you hang out with people whose husbands were serving overseas?

1-00:22:12

Butler: I don't understand exactly what you mean.

1-00:22:15

Matthews: Did you, did the people that you would hang out with in Richmond during the war, were they other people whose husbands were serving overseas?

1-00:22:26

Butler: Husbands or boyfriends. It was usually the people that I worked with. My sister in law, Raymond's brother's wife and I worked at the same place and there were probably about four or five others. We would get together, some of them were married, some of them weren't, engaged or whatnot and we just would go to the movie or shop and eat and that sort of thing. Then maybe once or twice a week, theaters downtown were open and you didn't have to ride out to way yonder and get them. Since we all worked downtown, the movie theaters were convenient to go to and restaurants really convenient and that's what we did. The rest of the time, we went home and looked for the letter.

1-00:23:23

Matthews: Did you all share any of the letters that you would from your husbands or their boyfriends, did you guys read each other the letters you were receiving?

1-00:23:34

Butler: I don't know, I've got to stop and think. I don't remember, I know I wrote often and I tried to write something every day and of course, he didn't because it wasn't convenient for him. We just mailed them and sometimes you'd get two or three at one time, depending on where he was. He traveled an awful lot while he was in the service. He went to Texas, then to Louisiana, he went to California and then to Boston and from Boston to Europe and back and then he went to the west coast again, to the Philippines and came back. He never wanted to travel very much again. It wasn't until I'd say mid to late sixties, early seventies that we began to travel because he said he'd had his fill. There wasn't anywhere else he wanted to see. But you know, we went to places around the state after he came home but never a long ways until finally we started traveling, and we did travel for a while until he got sick. That's life.

1-00:25:07

Matthews: Do you remember any of the movies that were out at the time? Like, what movies would you go see?

1-00:25:18

Butler: I remember seeing Mrs. Miniver. There were a lot of you know, just whatever was showing. I've seen so many during that period of time, it's just hard to remember but I do remember that one because it was a wartime thing. But like I say, it's difficult to pinpoint what was there during that time cause there've been so many years since. My first thought was to say the Wizard of Oz but the Wizard of Oz was done before the war started, because it was done in 1939. But I did see it, and the same thing is true with Gone With the Wind, it was a 1939 picture. I saw that, gosh, several times.

1-00:26:17

Matthews: My grandma remembers seeing Gone With the Wind for the first time too.

1-00:26:18

Butler: Oh, Clark Gable was something else.

1-00:26:22

Matthews: Do you remember, did you receive war information from any of these movies like the newsreels that they might have shown at the beginning?

1-00:26:29

Butler: I always looked and I always hoped maybe I'd get a glimpse of him but I never did. But that's mainly, that was the most timely thing that you could get because the newspapers would run later. But the newsreels seemed to be more on time, get those quicker than you did the other. But I just remember seeing the tanks and the soldiers with their guns and that sort of thing. I don't think they showed a lot of the actual fighting. Wasn't it Edward R. Murrow that was the person in London who gave a lot of updates at that time? I remember him. It's hard to remember and put everything in the right year that they happened.

1-00:27:34

Matthews: Oh, I'm not going to hold you to it, so don't worry. You're doing a great job so far. So, at your job do you ever remember seeing any propaganda, any war time posters, like give to the war effort, war bonds?

1-00:27:53

Butler: Yes. The one that's probably the most famous is Uncle Sam's: We Want You. I had a cousin who worked in the shipyard, and he came to Richmond one weekend. He told me that the sign that was all over the shipyards was Full Speed Up Ahead and Mass Production because they needed their boats so quickly. But I don't remember any—the one of Uncle Sam is the one that always stands out.

1-00:28:33

Matthews: Do you remember the effect rationing had on you?

1-00:28:35

Butler: Yes. Rationing was—I remember it was hard to get sugar; it was hard to get good leather shoes and coffee. I don't drink a lot of coffee but I know from the family it was. And even after he came home, there were shortages of lots of different foods. Butter was another thing that was hard to find. We went to a little grocery store and if you were a regular customer they had a habit of saving a few things back for you, and that's how you got along. When we had the coupons during the war, you had to have that little coupon in order to buy, even if they had it you had to have the coupon to get it. But we never went hungry. And when Raymond came home, one of the things he said that really bugged him was that sometimes—he remembered one time when they had to move from one place to another and they couldn't take everything with them, they buried sugar. And I'm thinking how bad at home we wanted it, but because they couldn't move it, they just buried it. But, I guess that's the way it was.

1-00:30:14

Matthews: Did you eat differently during the war because of rationing?

1-00:30:20

Butler: I don't think so. My mother did the cooking and I think that—I don't remember it being different. Of course, I think there were things that we didn't have that required sugar, and some things that required butter but I just don't remember not eating well. Maybe we did, but I don't remember. When you have a good cook in the house and they can manage a lot of things, of course, I never learned to cook, so [laughs] and to this day I don't like to cook. That's something else.

1-00:31:13

Matthews: Did you have a favorite meal that your mother made during the war maybe?

1-00:31:15

Butler: No, I just ate everything that she ever fixed. Particularly, I liked the desserts when we had sugar to make them. She managed well, particularly after my father died because income just wasn't there. He was a carpenter and I don't know how she managed, but she did. I do remember one funny thing that happened about cooking. She had a book, and I'd always liked to read and if I ever went to the bookcase and I saw this book and I'd go to put my hand on it, she'd say don't touch that book, that book was a wedding present. So I sneaked around and found out what the name of the book was. The book was entitled 1000 ways to please a husband. When I got to be about 12 or 13, that book really fascinated me. One day when she wasn't home, I decided to look at it. You know what it was? A cookbook with 1000 recipes in it! I was so disappointed, that killed my cooking genes I can tell you.

1-00:32:54

Matthews: I bet!

1-00:32:56

Butler: You can take that story out.

1-00:33:04

Matthews: When you went to school, was your school all-white?

1-00:33:08

Butler: Yes, all-white. Elementary and I went to what they called junior high school and high school and it was all white, never—in Richmond there were three or four all white schools, really mainly two white schools and then two all black schools. They didn't intermingle for sports or for anything, so I just never saw anybody until I was working. So I never had a problem with you know, the racial problems. My mother used to sew for an Afro-American family and they would come to the house and bring the materials [phone rings]

1-00:33:59

Matthews: It's ok, I can pause it. [coming back after a break] Alright so, we were talking about race, when you went to work during the war were there black women that worked with you?

1-00:34:15

Butler: The only person that was a black person was the janitor, who did the cleaning. Everybody else in the office was white and I really didn't run into working with black people until I went to work for the government. In the office that I worked in was all white but I was under the jurisdiction of the Philadelphia region and whenever I'd go to Philadelphia or they'd come here sometimes; I got acquainted

with them then but I never actually—it was some years before I ever actually worked with them and it—I just never had a problem.

1-00:35:11

Matthews: Were you aware about segregation?

1-00:35:13

Butler: Yes. I always remember when they had all those problems with, what county was it? I don't know, right off hand I can't remember the county but it was a big to-do about getting the counties not segregated but integrated. I remember when Martin Luther King and his marches and all of that sort of thing. But that's sort of—while I knew about it, it didn't really touch me like it would, you know being in the middle of it.

1-00:36:08

Matthews: Going back to rationing and items, do you remember any new items that you saw come out of the war?

1-00:36:17

Butler: Items that came out of the war?[shaking her head] No.

1-00:36:22

Matthews: Like my grandma talked about how she remembered seeing plastic for the first time.

1-00:36:27

Butler: Yeah, we do remember—and I remember when you started getting bread and things in plastics how you took them out and saved the plastics, washed them and kept them. The same thing was true with aluminum foil. If you got a piece of that, you bathed it and kept it. A strange use for it was you'd put it on—some of that aluminum foil on the ends of the antenna on the television set. I don't know what it did, but it's supposed to make the reception better. And we had an antenna on the house, on the roof of the house at the same time. I guess that came as some of the teachings of the war, I don't know. But, very different from pushing a button and saying here it is.

1-00:37:28

Matthews: That is true. Do you remember in your workplace was there any must-have item, like high heels or a certain purse or anything?

1-00:37:40

Butler: Well, you dressed, you did not go in—no woman wore slacks, there were no, what is it, Friday now that you have go as you please? No, but everybody dressed and I do remember one girl came to work one day with a blouse on that was quite low and thin and they sent her home to change clothes. It's—people look at me and say oh but they didn't and I say yes they did because they had a dress code for work and you wore heels and hose. Like I said, if your outfit didn't suit, then they sent you home. You could come back once you'd changed your clothes. It sounds harsh but that's the way it was.

1-00:38:44

Matthews: Did you ever really want to wear slacks or jeans?

1-00:38:48

Butler: No, I just knew that was what you were supposed to wear and I did and of course the fact that particularly during the war when Raymond was away, I didn't want to go—you didn't go out downtown

and go to the movies and nobody wore slacks! Very few people wore slacks. I always stayed dressed so I could go anywhere I wanted to go. It sounds funny now but that was a long time ago.

1-00:39:23

Matthews: So your workplace was a majority women then, or all women—was it all women? [Butler nods] And what company were you working for during the war?

1-00:39:30

Butler: At the time I was working for a company called Graybar Electric Company. I think they're still in business but I'm not sure, they may have gone to another name now. But I worked there until I got pregnant, of course nobody works once you begin to show, you had to leave and I left in the first part of January and then Raymond wasn't born until June. But, that's the way it was.

1-00:40:12

Matthews: What year was your son born? [Butler looks quizzical] What year was your son, Raymond born?

1-00:40:16

Butler: He was born in 1950. So, we had about decided that we weren't going to ever have any children because we'd been married like seven and a half years and I just thought that wasn't going to be. I remember we bought a car and the financing and everything to with a car and I told the people that I was with that day, I said when we get this car half-paid for I bet you I'll get pregnant and that's exactly what happened. The car was half paid for and then I got pregnant. But he is the only child we ever had, never had any more. He's one of a kind.

1-00:41:08

Matthews: Do you think you might have waited to have children longer because of the war, because of Raymond being gone?

1-00:41:12

Butler: Probably. Yeah, because I sure didn't want any with him away and living at home and all that, it probably did have something to do with it. But I was glad I got one.

1-00:41:32

Matthews: When Raymond was away, did you, did you move back with your mom [Butler nods] or did you and him have your own house? Ok.

1-00:41:38

Butler: My mother had remarried and so my sister was there and my mother and my stepfather and that marriage didn't work out so I guess by the time Ray was about sixteen, seventeen, she got married again and that seemed to work out much, much better.

1-00:42:07

Matthews: And you said your brother was in the navy?

1-00:42:09

Butler: Yes.

1-00:42:11

Matthews: Did he ever write you letters that were similar to Ray's?

1-00:42:16

Butler: No, he just didn't. I don't remember if he did, put it that way but I'm sure he corresponded with somebody.

1-00:42:31

Matthews: Did he get married before the war?

1-00:42:36

Butler: After. I really don't know when he got married—but I didn't go to the wedding so I don't know, you know, when it was—don't remember when it was. His marriage didn't work out so he got married again and apparently that worked much better for him. But I never saw a whole lot of him after he got out of the service. There were some family issues that—with my mother, that he didn't—they didn't work out so I never was real close to them after that.

1-00:43:26

Matthews: But you are very close with your sister.

1-00:43:28

Butler: Yes. She's never been married and when my mother passed away I knew that she needed help and I had tried to help her over the years and right now, she's in bad shape.

1-00:43:47

Matthews: Did she work during the war?

1-00:43:49

Butler: I don't think so because see, she's five years younger than I am. So, if I graduated, I graduated in '42, no she didn't, she went to school and graduated in '47. So, she wouldn't have, she was going to school all during the war.

1-00:44:15

Matthews: Did she go to college?

1-00:44:16

Butler: No. None of us did. Well, our brother did. Over the years, I got in one year, you know taking classes periodically but that's all. And that's one thing I regret, that I didn't but being married and having a family made it kind of difficult but I should have done better.

1-00:44:44

Matthews: Did you feel pressure to get married at a certain age, or anything because...?

1-00:44:49

Butler: No, I can't say that I did. It just happened.

1-00:45:01

Matthews: Did you feel the war was a 'just war', like I know Franklin Roosevelt has used that phrase? Were you behind the war effort?

1-00:45:09

Butler: I think I was really too young for World War II to be the, what's the word I want to use, that concerned with the war, except for where my husband was concerned. I do think some of the other wars we've been in have been unnecessary. Probably the fact that World War II as well as World War I kept

the enemy out of the United States; we never had to fight here. Maybe that justified it, I don't know. But my father was in World War I, my grandfather was in the Civil War, and here's a husband in World War II—that's enough war. But I think at times the United States has stuck their nose in things that they really didn't have to. But I'm not smart enough to know whether it's right or wrong.

1-00:46:30

Matthews: Do you remember how you celebrated Victory in Europe Day or Victory in Japan Day?

1-00:46:35

Butler: When the war ended in Europe, I went to church and they had a service at the church and it was a Methodist Church not far from where we lived. I walked over there and I remember going. But when the war ended with Japan, I met some friends and we went down on Broad Street and we walked from what seemed like one end of Broad Street to the other. And the street was just packed with people and horns blowing and yelling and screaming and all that kind of stuff. It was a happy occasion and then I remember we walked up and down Broad Street and until we finally decided it was time to go home, which was exciting.

1-00:47:30

Matthews: Did you, did Raymond come home on a plane when he came back from the Pacific?

1-00:47:35

Butler: He came back on a boat.

1-00:47:36

Matthews: Ok, were you there when his boat came in, do you remember?

1-00:47:39

Butler: No because the boat came to California and then he came by train to a place in North Carolina and then he was discharged there and then he came by train to Richmond and that's when I met him at the station in Richmond.

1-00:48:01

Matthews: That must have been a good feeling to be able to see him again.

1-00:48:03

Butler: Yep, sing hallelujah! [laughs]

1-00:48:10

Matthews: Did you know people that when you graduated were planning to enlist in the Army?

1-00:48:13

Butler: [nodding] I didn't know a lot of them; our class was real big, had over three hundred in the class. And there were some boys that enlisted right away, I didn't really know them, I just know them by name but I know that they did and I guess they felt the need to—well I think some people enlisted so they wouldn't get drafted and hopefully they could pick which service they wanted to go into.

1-00:48:50

Matthews: Did Raymond enlist?

1-00:48:51

Butler: No, he didn't volunteer [laughs]. He waited until they drafted him. He and his brother both were drafted. His brother was drafted about six months before he was and then Raymond got drafted. I think

people thought maybe he wouldn't have to go because he was the support of his mother and with one of the boys gone, I think they—but they took him anyway. So, some of his older brothers and sisters took care of her, well she passed away about a year after he went in the service. So, she—it was just one of those things.

1-00:49:42

Matthews: So if you could just tell me a little bit about how the draft process worked, like how did he know he had been drafted? Did he just get a letter in the mail or ?

1-00:49:50

Butler: Yeah, apparently they had records and they would send you a letter and say to report on such and such a date for your physical and then when you got your physical they would classify you. If you were 4F, it meant that you failed the physical but if you were whatever the criteria was to pass then they, if you passed, they gave you a date that you were to report for service. I don't remember exactly how much time there was between getting the letter and having the physical and when he actually had to leave, it's probably a couple of weeks but I just don't remember, my memory's hazy about how long it was. Like I said, we debated about whether to get married before he left or not, then we finally decided we would.

1-00:50:59

Matthews: It seems like it was a good decision, since it all worked out. Did you have a radio in your house?

1-00:51:12

Butler: Yeah, we had a radio. An old, I think it was a Philco and it was funny looking. It was you know, oval shaped [makes arch with hands], like that, and I know at night we used to listen to stories, like almost like soap operas. They used to be some scary things that would come on. Then there was something my mother always liked that was called, the program was called One Man's Family and it was all about this one particular family but we had to keep quiet while the radio was on.

1-00:52:00

Matthews: Would they ever interrupt a show's broadcast to say something about the war?

1-00:52:06

Butler: I'm sure they did but that's hazy in my memory; I just don't remember them doing that. I'm sure they had commercials because [raises eyebrows.]

1-00:52:20

Matthews: No, that's fine, I just think about today when we have the storm warnings that go across the bottom of the screen on the TV.

1-00:52:26

Butler: Well, I don't remember—but see we wouldn't have any way of seeing them but I don't think they did. It may be so, but I just don't remember.

1-00:52:39

Matthews: Did you have a favorite radio show?

1-00:52:43

Butler: Amos 'n Andy. You know? You don't remember?

1-00:52:48

Matthews: I do, I've just heard about them, so.

1-00:52:52

Butler: Yeah. There were several other things that were programs that we listened to regularly but I—Jot Em Down Store was in one of the programs but I can't remember what that one was called. But in the evenings, we, we listened. I don't remember listening in the daytime. My mother may have listened to some of the stories that came on but I never was home, so I don't know. But we listened at night; it was the only entertainment you had.

1-00:53:35

Matthews: Do you remember, like a lot of other people coming over to listen to your radio, if they didn't have their own?

1-00:53:41

Butler: No, I don't remember people coming to the radio but I do remember before we got a television, we used to go to people's houses to watch television. There used to be wrestling shows that came on, the men liked, and we would go to somebody's house and watch wrestling [rolls eyes] which I didn't really like but it was something to do. But I think everybody just about had a radio.

1-00:54:24

Matthews: When did you first hear about the nuclear bomb? Like, the one that was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the Pacific.

1-00:54:35

Butler: I don't remember. I do remember seeing in the newsreels, the pictures but I don't remember when I heard about it, you know. So by the time they got the, wasn't it Truman that ordered it to be done? Like I say, I do remember seeing that was done with those bombs but I don't remember how I heard about it first.

1-00:55:04

Matthews: Did you remember ever being in fear of the Germans or the Japanese?

1-00:55:12

Butler: [shaking her head] No. Never did. A lot of people did but I don't ever remember meeting any of them.

1-00:55:22

Matthews: Did you, were you ever scared of those groups in particular because you knew the war was against them?

1-00:55:30

Butler: Was I afraid?

1-00:55:31

Matthews: Yes.

1-00:55:32

Butler: No I can't say that I was and I think it was because I didn't know anybody. If I'd known somebody maybe I would have been. But I don't think so.

1-00:55:43

Matthews: Were you aware that on the Pacific coast, I've heard that there were Japanese that were imprisoned. Did you know about that at the time?

1-00:55:53

Butler: Yeah. I had heard that they had impounded everything but most of those were on the West Coast and I don't remember anything, any of them being on the East Coast. Maybe they were but most of the things that I heard about were on the West Coast where so many of them lived, particularly in California. It's where they gathered them together and—I know so many of them felt such bitterness about that eventually the government in fairly recent years paid them so much money for their internment. But I don't, I don't—the fact that I never knew any of them personally, it didn't affect me like it would if I had known somebody.

1-00:56:50

Matthews: Did you remember hearing about what the Nazis were doing in Germany?

1-00:56:55

Butler: Yeah. I remember that particularly when they were taking over Poland for example and then as they sort of ate up everybody and—I did remember hearing about that but like I said the fact that they didn't come to the United States didn't affect me like it would if I had lived in Poland.

1-00:57:23

Matthews: Right, it is a completely different experience if you're not really personally connected with it. Did Raymond ever meet Nazis? Did he ever write to you about meeting—you said he saw Adolf Hitler's house-but did he ever see any of the Nazi officers when he was driving the ambulances?

1-00:57:44

Butler: Well, I don't know what he saw but this bayonet and gun that he'd brought back and the stick pin that he had, he took off of a German officer. And they were, as I said, the bayonet and the gun and all were real fancy and so was the fact that, it seems strange to say he's gone to war with a stick pin that had diamonds in it but that's the way it was. So, of course when he went to the Philippines there wasn't anything like that except he did go to Manila and buy a piece of jade but that's all. But I do remember him saying that this stick pin, that he wasn't supposed to have it. And I wondered how did he get it through the inspected, inspection to get it home and he had a can that had powder in it for, a foot powder. So he dropped it in that so when they shook it, it didn't rattle. So he got it through that was whereas if he'd you know tried to put it in a can and shook it, they would have looked in it. But because it had that foot powder in there, he put it in there and they never knew he brought it home. That he got off a German officer, so he said.

1-00:59:33

Matthews: So was he ever in France when he was in Europe? Do you remember?

1-00:59:39

Butler: He went through France; I don't think that they really stopped because they were moving forward in the war until he got to Austria and that's when the war ended. But I never heard him—well, he did say one time they started to get some, buy some perfume. It had a number on it and he didn't think it smelt so good. You know what he's talking about? Chanel No. 5. He didn't buy it. He didn't think—in those days that was THE perfume to have and real expensive but over there it wasn't that way. But he said he didn't like the smell of that so I didn't get any Chanel no. 5

1-01:00:35

Matthews: That's an interesting story. [long pause]. So would you ever have parties at your house or did you go to like any parties during the war at other people's houses?

1-01:01:00

Butler: I don't remember any. If we had any, it was low key and I don't remember, not off the top of my head. No, sometimes he did come home on furlough once or twice and you know, I'd go out with friends but I wouldn't really call them parties.

1-01:01:29

Matthews: So when he was home, you guys would just go out, you wouldn't host things at your house?

1-01:01:32

Butler: Yeah.

1-01:01:42

Matthews: Do you remember any restaurants in particular that you would go to in downtown Richmond?

1-01:01:49

Butler: There were a lot of restaurants downtown but I don't remember, trying to remember—the names have changed so many times over the years. I do remember that there's a place called Angelo's, had the best hot dogs you ever ate. I did like that. I think there was a Shoney's downtown but as far as—and both department stores, Thalhimer's and Miller and Rhoads had excellent restaurants in them, excuse me, in those and we'd go in there and eat a lot. They would have restaurants upstairs and then they had a cheaper price things in the basement so it was a question of whether you ate in the basement or you ate in the upstairs part but the food was always good. If I didn't have to cook it, it was good.

1-01:02:56

Matthews: Did you ever have a favorite place to shop during the war?

1-01:03:01

Butler: I did most of my shopping at Miller and Rhoads and Thalhimer's or a little shop called La Vogue. I bought a lot of clothes in La Vogue. I went to Berry Burk. When Raymond got out of the service, he was so thin, he'd lost a lot of weight and we went to Berry Burk because they sold boys clothes and he weighed so we bought his shirts and things in the boys department [laughs]. But, of course, he finally outgrew that. By then, I would buy clothes in there—they were all fairly close to each other downtown. But I do remember those four places that I used to shop.

1-01:03:55

Matthews: Was there a Woolworth's in Richmond at the time? I know there are like, these stores called Woolworth's that come about in like the 1930s. Was there one in Richmond?

1-01:04:04

Butler: Yeah. That was, that was at the corner. Miller and Rhoads was on the corner then there was a Woolworth's right down the same block that so. There was also another place about a block further up called W.T. Grant and they had a lunch bar in there where you could go in and eat. There was a drugstore that was on Broad Street and I can't remember the name of it but I do remember when black people went in and tried to sit down and get served and they wouldn't serve them. And then, I do remember that they picketed until finally—that—they did. Like I say, I can't remember the name of it, the drugstore but they had a lunch counter and they had a counter upstairs and that's where the black people usually ate—no more.

1-01:05:26

Matthews: Were a lot of these stores like you said, Miller and Rhoads, were they like variety stores, so they just sold a little bit of everything?

1-01:05:32

Butler: They sold everything. So did Thalhimer's. And they were, in a way they were rivals of each other but you could go there and buy anything in either store. Everything. If they didn't have it upstairs, they had it in the basement. Which I shopped in the basement a lot [laughs].

1-01:06:07

Matthews: If you could sum up your wartime experience with just one sentence, how do you think you would do that?

1-01:06:14

Butler: One sentence? That takes some thought. That period was very sad, very stressful and yet there were times when I was happy from a personal standpoint because when we were together, these were the days that it was happy. Sometime—this is already more than two sentences—sometimes the war seemed so far away I felt like I was almost untouched. And then again, it would be so close that I felt that it was overwhelming at times. Simply because, my husband was away. I don't know how I would have reacted if I had not been married, probably quite differently. But that put a certain wrinkle on it, didn't it. That made it very personal

1-01:07:33

Matthews: Is there anything else you think I missed or you'd like to say about the war?

1-01:07:39

Butler: I'm glad it's over with [laughs]. It was a long, drawn out affair but I'm glad it's over. I'm glad that it was a learning experience. It was a time for both of us to grow in different ways; that when he came back in some ways it was very hard to get adjusted, in other ways it was just real happy to have him back. But like I said, we at seventeen and nineteen and three years later, we changed a whole lot. And I think the maturity helped us. I wouldn't want to do it again. I wouldn't advise for anybody to do although I know lots of people who got married early like we did and it worked and for some it didn't. But I would not advise it.

1-01:08:51

Matthews: Do you think that because you spent a lot of time apart during your first couple of years married that that might have helped it last longer instead of you all being thrown into this situation immediately?

1-01:09:02

Butler: Yeah, in a way yes because so often, with young couples, when they get married, they've got to have an apartment, they've got to have a house full of furniture, they've got to have this and we did not have to do that. When he came home on furlough or I was out with him, we didn't have to worry about the bills like that. We had enough money that, with his allotment, to get by. We didn't have a whole lot but we did. And I think, when he came home, we lived in two rooms in my grandmother's house and that made a big difference that we didn't have to furnish this house and buy a car and tv and all that until we got settled and more mature. But, we made it.

1-01:10:11

Matthews: So when he came home, did you keep working?

1-01:10:14

Butler: Yeah. I kept working up until Raymond was born in 1950. He had worked at the tobacco factory before he went in service and they took him back and he worked there until, in 1950 they had a big layoff and they were closing part of the plant or something and he got laid off and then for about five months, we just more or less lived on. I had to stop work because I was pregnant and then we just lived on our savings that we had until he found a regular job. And he worked that job for thirty years, then they closed up, so he was out of a job.

1-01:11:12

Matthews: Did you have any friends that you had worked with during the war that had lost their jobs as a result of the men coming back?

1-01:11:21

Butler: No, I don't remember anybody that did. I think a lot of people when they came back, went to college rather than try to go back to work. I just don't remember that a lot of young men in the office where I worked.

1-01:11:46

Matthews: Did Raymond get his GI Bill when he got out of the war, like did he use his GI Bill that he would have gotten?

1-01:11:55

Butler: Did he use his?

1-01:11:56

Matthews: GI Bill

1-01:11:58

Butler: No, he never did. We—he signed up one time and then he got a job and then he just never did use it. But a lot of people did and it was a big help because if you got that GI Bill you could go to school. But he did not.

1-01:12:30

Matthews: Alright, well I think we got a lot of great information today. I want to thank you for letting me talk to you. I can always come back and follow up with things that I noticed that we didn't cover but I think we've got enough for today so thank you so much.

1-01:12:46

Butler: No problem. Well just hope you didn't break your camera [laughs]