

NARRATOR: Butler, Tessa
INTERVIEWER: Troy Reeves
DATE: March 11, 2004
LOCATION: Pocatello, Idaho
PROJECT: Women in WWII/Veterans History Project

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START OF INTERVIEW

00:00	1	Introduction
00:30	1	Butler began by spelling her first and last names and by giving her maiden name, Vitjens. Vitjens grew up in the Netherlands (Holland) in The Hague. She lived in The Hague until a few days after the War entered Holland in May 10, 1940, when the Germans invaded the Netherlands. She talked about her family's house in The Hague and the summer cottage in the south of Holland. The village was called Nederhemert. She knew of the rise of Germany before May 1940, including the Dutch Army building bomb shelters. She described the bomb shelter closest to her home in The Hague. She told about an auction that she and other children participated in to get money to give to people in Poland (she thought) and about her mother's "fleeing [suit]case."
05:30	3	Butler gave a geography lesson to the interviewer about Holland, including how Netherlands and Holland are synonymous. She then discussed how the day that the Germans capitulated (May 5, 1945) has become the big holiday in Holland. Butler's father was a painter or artist. She showed the interviewer a picture painted by her father of an area on the Columbia River in Washington/Oregon. She continued to talk about her father's work and her father's life history, particularly as it pertained to his painting. Butler told an interesting story about how her father declined the opportunity to travel, accompanying some of his artwork, on the <i>Titanic</i> .
11:30	6	Butler's mother was a librarian when she met her future husband. She stopped being a librarian after they married. Butler said that neither of her parents' professions influenced her life or hobbies. Butler was her parents' only child, although they harbored two Jewish girls during the War. Butler was a pre-teen when the Germans invaded her country; she said she did not think about her country being taken over. She did wonder, however, why the Germans were there. She had decided after the War that she would not speak German. (She studied four languages in school: English, Dutch, German, and French.) The German Army took over their

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		home later in the War. (Butler discussed this fact later in the interview.) Butler and her family were not Jewish and really did not practice an organized religion; she told a story about her father and grandfather becoming Catholic during her father's pre-teen years. Butler felt it important to be a good human being and not necessarily join an organized religion.
17:00	9	Butler lived in at their house in The Hague between 1934 and May 26, 1940, when they moved permanently to the house in the country. She described the country home. She mentioned that people in Nederhemert called the village, "The Island." She explained why it earned that nickname and how they used water and rainwater for their needs. She felt "great" about moving out to the country. She attended a public school in another village, near Nederhemert. Butler talked about the religion makeup of southern Holland and the effect that had on schooling and protocols. Butler returned to school in the fall of 1940; she told a story about taking a rowboat to get to and from school. In the winter the river would freeze, which allowed them to use it for a skating rink. Also, they would attend school in the winter depending on when the river froze or thawed.
23:30	12	During the early years in the village, they rarely saw the Germans. She noted the problems in the early years of the War arose from Jews being sent to labor or relocation or death camps. She told a story about taking a trip during Easter vacation during 1942; she and her family saw hundreds of Jews lined up to take the train to the camps, including some friends of theirs. Later in life Butler's mother called it "the most rotten vacation they ever took." As a twelve year old, she knew that these Jews were leaving and possibly never coming back.
26:30	13	With prompting from the interviewer, Butler discussed why her family harbored two Jewish girls for the last half of the War. She explained the reasons that they cared for these two specific girls. (Their names while living with Butler's family were Dieneke and Lonnie. Their real names were Noemi Kahn and Lonnie Lesser.) The younger of the two girls, Lonnie, would state her real name on occasion, which could have caused problems. Butler talked about Dieneke's family, including how her brother ended up in the US, joined the US Army, eventually helping to liberate the Dutch. Her brother found Dieneke after the family was forced to leave Nederhemert. [At 30:30 the analog cassette copy shifts from side one to side two.] Butler talked about how the Dutch Resistance helped these two girls with false papers and how Butler's family provide the fabricated stories about these two girls.

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32:15	16	Butler talked about her best friend, a girl who lived on the island. That woman moved to Oregon and is the reason why Butler ended up in the US. Up until D-Day life was fairly quiet in Nederhemert. Once the Allies reached the river, they stayed in the north, leaving the Germans to control the south and “The Island.” When this event occurred, people from Nederhemert evacuated on several occasions to several locations. She explained how they used subterfuge to stay in one location and how her father was “hired” by the Germans to paint “Forbidden” [skull and crossbones] signs. Butler then described the geography of “The Island” and how it led to the Germans acquiring their house as a command center. So, the Butler family and their two harbored Jews lived for a time with the German Army.
38:00	18	Butler said that the first Germans that commandeered the house were older and polite. The next Germans that arrived were the younger, “Hitler Youth,” and their demeanor was much different. Some people in the village kept radios and listened to Radio Orange, which offered War news. She briefly talked about harboring Dutch resistance men, hearing about Germany’s surrender, and dealing with the V-1 and V-2 rockets or “Buzz Bombs.” She offered her memories of late November/early December last big battle of the War, The Battle of the Bulge. In May 1945 they returned to their house in the country. She talked about the state of the home when they returned. That memory led Butler to talk about a house near a monastery in a village named Bern, which was also part of “The Island.” Butler’s father bought the house and tried to restore it, but the Allies bombed it and burned it down. Butler’s father attitude was “Well, let’s try to rebuild it.” They did renovate it and moved in around 1950.
45:15	21	Butler felt her father joined the Dutch Resistance, because he had to help. Butler explained the layout of the village (Nederhemert). Butler’s best friend’s father was raided because he had a radio. She explained how the “good” police stations would notify the village of a future raid. The Germans would block all entry, so Butler would jump rope up to the barricade, beg the Germans to let her through to see her friend. Once she got through the line, she would notify people who were harboring Jews or Dutch Resisters of a raid. Towards the end of the War, they were evacuated from their home to a castle on “The Island.” Butler’s father would return to the home during non-bombing periods to retrieve books. One time Butler’s father encountered a German. A bomb blew the German up, and Butler only lost his glasses. The next day he returned to the spot and found his glasses.

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51:00	25	With prompting from the interviewer, Butler talked about living the German soldiers. Butler said that her parents never told her that these two girls were Jews until after the War. Butler noted that the less people that knew the truth about Dieneke and Lonnie the better. She told a story about how Lonnie told a playmate that when she grew up she would go with her parents to Palestine. Fortunately, no German heard her. The story led Butler to discuss how her village friend, Cornelia Laakso, immigrated to Oregon in the late 1940s, which led Butler to immigrate to Canada and eventually the US. Butler then spoke of what happened to the family members of Lonnie and Dieneke. Dieneke lost her father only, and Lonnie's parents eventually made it to Israel. Lonnie eventually flew from Amsterdam to Israel to reunite with her parents.
56:15	27	Years after the War, Dieneke and Lonnie helped Butler's parents the Yad Vashem medal. Butler's mother was still living and was going to go to Israel to plant a tree. Before she was to leave, Israel made a military offensive (perhaps on Lebanon). Butler's mother decided not to go to Israel for that reason. Butler reflected on her parents' role in the Dutch Resistance or underground. She hoped that people would do similar things, because when people are in need, others need to help them. Butler's years in the War have made her anti-war. She offered her opinions about the US' current role in the world.
60:00	28	Butler strongly believed in the United Nations. She belonged to UNICEF and felt that the UN served as the best way for people to get along in the world. [Note: The rest of this recording is found on the beginning of the second analog cassette.] Butler concluded with her story of why she came to the US and how she ended about in Pocatello. She has lived in Idaho for over forty years and considered herself an Idahoan.
63:30	28	END OF TAPE ONE END OF INTERVIEW

NAMES AND PLACES INDEX

Butler, Robert
Kahn, Noemi (Dieneke Morsink)
Laakso, Cornelia
Lesser, Lonnie (Lonnie von Lessen)
Nederhemert, Netherlands
Pocatello, Idaho
The Battle of the Bulge
The Hague, Netherlands
Titanic(RMS)
United Nations