

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Donald Butler on August 21, 2012 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The interview will be conducted by Peggy Frankston in English. Good afternoon, Mr. Butler.

Good afternoon.

Would you be so kind as to introduce yourself for the interview, giving your full name, your date of birth, and your place of birth, please?

I am Donald Butler. I was born in Pittsburgh 93 years ago. And--

Donald?

Could you tell me a little about your childhood? What were your parents' names?

Frank and Molly Butler. And they were married not far from Pittsburgh. And--

What was your father's profession?

Well, he was a grocer, grocery. And, well we did, we were involved immediately with helping Jewish people everywhere around.

You went to public school?

Yes.

And you had a Jewish education?

Yes, I went. I graduated at a religious training college in Pittsburgh.

What year was that?

The years are fuzzy with me.

If you're 93 years old, were you born in 1919?

Right.

So you were in school with my father and my stepfather.

Yeah, I [INAUDIBLE].

Howard Silverman and Arthur Frankston.

Arthur, I remember. I probably remember Howard, too.

They both went to Taylor Allderdice.

Yeah.

So while in the '30s, do you remember hearing about what was going on in Germany?

Yes, faintly. We had just fuzzy comments about it. And I read about it in the papers. And we didn't know what was going on. Nobody knew. Ostensibly, nobody knew. But somebody must have known.

But it was a difficult time. People were concerned and had protest meetings and delegations to Washington, elsewhere. Same time, Israel was in-- the problem in Israel was coming to the fore at that time. And Pittsburgh played a very important part in the establishment of the state of Israel.

Did you belong to any Jewish organizations--

Oh, yes.

--that promoted aliyah, going to Israel?

Yes! Paul Mizrahi was daily-- your daily lives, we were involved in everything. And with-- after Taylor Allderdice, I went into business.

You went right from Taylor Allderdice into business?

So you must have graduated around 1937?

'36.

'36, OK. And you went into business with your father? Or did you have another business?

I went into business with my brother.

And what did you do?

We were in the publishing business. We published the playbill in the theater. All the shows that came to Pittsburgh had our imprimatur.

So you had all-- you were connected to all the theater troupes and--

Yes, the Nixon Theater and the [PLACE NAME]. And all the civic live operas, the grand opera, all the cultural events in Pittsburgh was required a program. And I did special work with Pavarotti. And I just worked with Harry Belafonte and even Janis Joplin, I mean, Joan Baez. [INAUDIBLE] [? there ?] [? was a lot of ?] [? the ?] [INAUDIBLE] [? involved, ?] and they were very, very interesting.

So tell me, when Europe entered the war, when France and England declared war on Germany, it was September 1, 1939. Do you remember that?

Yes.

And where were you?

'39? I was in Pittsburgh. And I was to be drafted in '40-- I think, '41. I had enlisted instead.

You voluntarily enlisted?

Yes. And came into what was called the volunteer officers candidate. And I left Pittsburgh--

When--

--in February?

In February, '40? 1940, would that be? Or '41?

'41.

Where did they send you?

Sent me to Camp Meade, and then later to Aberdeen Proving Ground in Baltimore. And I was-- I became a soldier.

What kind of training did you receive since you were in officers candidate school?

I didn't go to officers candidate school. I was in the army seven weeks, and it was decided that I had to win the war. So I was sent overseas. That time, they were needing people overseas. So I went to-- I landed in Port Lyautey in Casablanca.

Were you sent by plane?

No.

By ship?

By ship.

Do you remember the name of the ship?

Yeah, Empress of Scotland. The Empress of Scotland.

The Empress of Scotland.

That was a British ship.

Well, did you get to Britain first, and then from Britain?

No.

No?

No. We came right to Casablanca.

From where? Baltimore? Where did you leave? What was the port of departure? New York?

No. In Norfolk.

Norfolk, Virginia?

Yeah.

Hampton Roads Virginia. Hampton Roads was where I was-- and I remember it was a British ship, British crew. And the interesting thing is, at that time, Axis Sally was very active for the Germans. And they had a radio. She was on the radio all day long, coming [INAUDIBLE] used to get her tirades. I mean, she would say oh, you feel sorry for your boys, how their girlfriends is back in the States. That sort of trouble was terrible, everything. And the Germans were doing the right thing, and so forth.

Who was this person who was being--

Axis Sally.

Axis Sally. Oh, she was a voice of Axis propaganda.

Yes.

And she was trying to influence, in English, Allied soldiers?

Absolutely. As a matter of fact, it was very interesting. I remember [INAUDIBLE] the-- we came across-- she said, I feel so sorry for you boys, feel terrible, because of the English boat, the Empress of Scotland, has just been bombed and sunk. And we were on that boat. And too bad, they said. All American boys were lost, and all that. That was-- we were on that boat.

So you knew it was a lie.

Yeah, of course.

And how long did the trip take from Virginia to Casablanca?

Oh, probably about a week.

So you were enrolled seven weeks. Did you learn how to use a gun?

Yes.

So you were in the infantry?

Qualified-- no. I was in-- I was placed in the ordnance.

In the ordnance. Could you explain what that is?

Ordnance takes care of all the weapons in the Army. I had had a very good friend in America, in Pittsburgh, who knew the head man, the head officer in Camp Meade. He said, when you got to Camp Meade, you ask to see Major [? Frody. ?]

[? Frody. ?]

Right. And I did. And he was very nice to me. And he asked me what branch of service I would like to be in. So of course, [INAUDIBLE]. I said, I liked the Air Force. So he says, no. That's pretty full. We got to put you in the service [? here. ?] And I was put into ordnance because that was the closest thing to being safe. [LAUGHS]

You were in ordnance for the Army, or for the Air Force?

Army.

For the Army. So you took care to make sure that equipment was in working order.

I didn't take care of anything. I was just learning. I was just [INAUDIBLE]. They would put me in the spot, and that's where I was.

Well, why did they take you to North Africa?

They needed me to win the war.

I know, but they had to-- you had to be able to do something. [LAUGHS]

[INAUDIBLE] hadn't, that time. But had to have seven weeks of training. And I was in training, marching and everything that they do in the Army. Of course, now as I think of it, it was a big waste of time. But I couldn't help myself. You know, you don't do what you want to do.

Especially during wartime.

Yeah, you do as you're told. But at that time, I got involved in-- I used to conduct services with soldiers in camp. And I was not doing any ordnance work. But I was assigned to that. Then we were in Port Lyautey.

Where were you? You arrived in Casablanca.

And we were sent-- and I was sent to Casablanca. I went through to Fes, Marrakesh, and then ended up in Oran.

In Oran, Algeria?

Algeria.

You mentioned another name-- Port Lyautey?

Port Lyautey was where we landed in Casablanca. We stayed in Casablanca just a few days. But it was a very interesting experience.

Can you tell us about your first impressions about when you got off the Empress of Scotland? Was it hot?

It was warm, yeah. It was warm weather there. It was-- I remember all the Arab kids, for chewing gum, chewing gum. That was my impression upon arriving there.

And later, I went to Oran. And I came to-- I was billeted in a place called Canastel.

Canastel?

Canastel by the Sea. That was a very lovely place. That villas, and--

Did they requisition private homes? Or did you have barracks?

No, we had to have private homes. In fact, we had the villas, because we were billeted in--

You were part of--

So you lived with the families?

No.

They-- the families had to leave?

I was assigned to the First Replacement Depot. That was the depot where all newcomers to Africa were sent to be processed, to be sent-- there were [INAUDIBLE].

One sec-- this is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Donald Butler on August 21. So you lived in a villa. And you were one of the new recruits.

That's right. And we didn't train. We did-- essentially, we just waited around to be assigned.

But they didn't give you any supplementary training?

Not any more than the usual marching and carrying loads from one place to another.

Did you have any contact with the local population, the Jewish population?

Oh, yes. Had very-- had a wonderful-- after I was back up. When I came to Oran, it was only five days before there was-- the yellow bands were to be distributed by Vichy France. The yellow bands were in them warehouses. So we were accepted by a wonderful Jewish community there. I knew the Grand Rabbin [INAUDIBLE], and I was very close with his family. I remember his name. His name was Ashkenazi.

Ashkenazi-- he was very well known. Yes. He was the Grand Rabbin of Algeria at that point.

Right. And I was a [INAUDIBLE]. I immediately got involved in the Jewish world there. And I met so many good people, so many wonderful-- because afterwards, I was assigned in Oran. They kept me in Oran. I don't know why. But I was assigned there. And I was working with the Protestant chaplain.

I was-- the Protestant chaplain. His name was William [? Estes. ?] He was a Protestant chaplain. And he was very, very good to me, very nice. He said, this Jewish boy was a good luck charm. He started as a First Lieutenant and then ended up as a Lieutenant Colonel. So he was very, very-- anything I needed, I wanted. And I had the opportunity to be at services. I used to conduct the services in Oran.

Was there a large Jewish population--

Yes.

--in that group of--

Soldiers?

--the soldiers who came?

No. Not large. There was a substantial--

Enough to attend services?

Oh, yes. We were-- we used to get 20, 30 every-- I had services on the weekend.

And how many were-- was it a battalion that came over on the Empress of Scotland?

No. Empress of Scotland was only the vehicle that brought us.

All right. But it brought a group of soldiers.

Oh, yes.

And it was-- was it a regiment or a battalion?

Oh, I don't know.

OK, so you were in Casablanca. And then you were in Marrakesh and Fes. Do you have any memory of Marrakesh and Fes?

Only the [FRENCH]. We traveled on forty and eights. The baggage cars, actually.

They were called [FRENCH]?

[FRENCH].

So you spoke a little French?

Yes, I speak French.

And that's how you got along with the French population?

Yes, I-- those Jewish people, they were wonderful, wonderful people. And I know [INAUDIBLE] families that-- and particularly there was one. When I was finally stationed in Oran, I was billeted at Canastel. And I was coming-- I had the freedom of going. And the chaplains actually had a great amount of freedom. So I was go Friday-- there was Friday night services every-- and there was a synagogue. And it was packed.

In Oran?

In Oran. Beautiful, big synagogue-- it was built, patterned after the synagogue in Bordeaux. Then I got involved with-- first, I was assigned with Chaplain [? Estes ?] as his assistant. I was [INAUDIBLE] to Chaplain-- the assistant had to-- they usually was an organist because they would play. They had a hand organ. But I didn't play the piano. But he took me as his assistant and had an organist. So I was very fortunate.

What kind of things did you do for the chaplain, Chaplain [? Estes? ?]

Everything. I wrote his reports. And I organized. I have some pictures of him. It's right here. And we had classes. And we had visiting speakers periodically.

There were speakers who spoke on a religious subject? Protestant subject, or a Jewish subject?

Protestant [INAUDIBLE]. Course, that was later in Italy. But in Africa-- I realize I'm a little disjointed here.

That's all right. But we'll-- let's stay in North Africa for a while. So did you arrive after the Allies liberated North Africa?

Yes.

You were after Operation Torch?

Yes.

So you probably were there in-- you said you mentioned February, March '43, maybe.

No.

No? That's too early? That's too late.

I was in Italy already.

Oh, OK. So you were--

I was '41.

You were '41. But Operation Torch was '42. That's when North Africa was liberated. So perhaps you were preparing to liberate Morocco and Algeria. Did you hear what was going on with the German troops in Africa, in Tunisia and the

Sahara and--

Rommel, and so forth? Yeah, we knew. We knew. Montgomery-- General Eisenhower was my commanding officer. Eisenhower was your commanding officer.

Yeah. The Mediterranean Base Command-- MBS. Mediterranean Base Command-- that was his bailiwick. And--
Do you remember hearing about the Battle of Alamein?

No.

That was Montgomery.

Well, probably. I probably did.

But it was a while ago.

Yeah.

So you were-- you set up a routine working with Chaplain [? Estes. ?] And you were based in Oran.

I had my own little office with him. And he was very, very nice, took care of me and the Jewish men, anything they needed, because the table organization for that unit said don't fall for a Jewish chaplain. I was told I served under [? Estes ?] for the needs of the Jewish men. And then--

How did you-- because there was a letter that I learned about that you sent to your fiance, Chantze.

It's in that book.

And that's-- I only glanced at it. I'll look at it later. But at one point, you went to Palestine. Was that before Italy?

Yes.

Tell me about that. Were you on leave?

I was very close to the chaplain. And the base chaplain was Protestant chaplain, too. His name was Norman Edwards. He came to visit. And I became very friendly every time he would come to visit. And I said-- and the Army regulations came through, which I would receive in the office, saying that Jewish chaplains-- this was after the war. Jewish chaplains could go to the Holy Land, could go to Palestine, on leave for R&R.

So I said to Chaplain [? Estes, ?] said would I be able to go? Would I be able? No, you'd have to be a commissioned officer. So [INAUDIBLE] channels and try it. So I wrote the letter. Ostensibly, [? Estes ?] wrote the letter.

He signed it?

Yeah. And he came, and saying that I had family in Israel, in Palestine, and I speak Hebrew, and I'm fluent, I know Chief Rabbi [INAUDIBLE]. And I dropped a lot of names and things. And came through the channels. [? It's ?] [? not ?] [? only ?] [? them. ?] And I was allowed to go. I was the only enlisted man-- I was a Corporal. I was the only enlisted man who was given that tour.

How did you get there? You left on a plane from Oran?

Yeah. From Oran. Well, I had to [INAUDIBLE]. I had to hitchhike.

You had to hitchhike on a plane?

Yeah. What it was, you go to the--

Air base?

The air base. At that time, the air base was on-- [INAUDIBLE]. Was in Morocco. But-- forgot the name of it. You go to that. And then you find out your plane going. And who's going to--

The Middle East.

--the Middle East? Finally, I got-- so I went. I remember I went from-- I remember that name. In Oran, Oran airport to Libya.

Tripoli?

Benghazi.

Ah, Benghazi.

Went to Benghazi. And I stayed there for a day or so, till you get another hitch. And I hitched to Payne Field in Egypt. Payne Field, there in--

Where was it near?

It's a big city.

Cairo?

Cairo! Payne Field was just-- that was the airport at Cairo. And I came there. And I remember that when I came to Cairo, the--

I mean, you arrived at the airport in Cairo.

The airport, yeah.

Were you greeted by somebody?

Only as a soldier. I reported to the American Army base there. And I was granted-- I wanted to go to [? Teletwinsky ?]. [? Teletwinsky ?] was the Army camp in Tel Aviv, the American Army camp. [? Teletwinsky ?].

[? Teletwinsky ?].

And I had-- I don't know if I had orders to go there or not. But I would go. See, my original orders-- which I still have-- original orders from Eisenhower were to go by land, sea, or air, whichever was available. So I wanted to go to Palestine.

So I remember that I got-- they gave a command car and a driver. And I rode across the desert in the car. And I came there. And I ended up in Tel Aviv.

How many days of travel?

Well, probably it was-- had a driver, I don't remember. Not too-- not long. It was a day, maybe, a day or more.

Did they-- did you have cans of gas and gasoline in the--

That was [INAUDIBLE]. I was-- a pawn of the army there. I mean, whatever I had I have, why, the Army gave me.

I know. But they did-- so you sort of hitched a ride on a car that was, or a truck--

No, I didn't. I was just given that car. I was--

Privileged.

--assigned to the car with the driver. And I remember going across the desert and stopping at what was called Mt. Sinai at that time. And I remember I brought myself some rocks from Mt. Sinai. And they were very-- I had no problem. I had-- I was a lucky guy.

What do you mean? You weren't attacked by anybody?

No. And matter of fact, in Cairo when I came to Cairo, I stayed at-- what was a fancy hotel in--

It was a fancy hotel inside of Cairo?

In Cairo. I stayed there. And I had the freedom of-- I was in Cairo for almost a week. And I spent Shabbos there.

Did you go to the synagogue there?

I got involved in the synagogue. And I remember as a kid, it made an impression on me. They-- the men with davening, and they wore a fez. And they would-- they were davening, they were shaking. They just davened just like everybody else davened. And the one with the tassels was [? shaking. ?] It was very interesting. And the--

Did you have dinner or go to any of the families, the Jewish families?

Yes. Not in Cairo. I was-- plus, I didn't know anybody there. But in Oran, I had very, very good-- I had the-- there was a woman, very, very-- they [INAUDIBLE] consul to some country. But he had passed away. She was older woman. She must have been in her 80s. And she took a shine to me. I mean, very-- Madam Toledano. Judith Toledano.

Toledano?

From a very famous family, Toledano. And she had-- in Oran, she was a very, very prominent woman. She was a very wealthy woman, very prominent. And Judith Toledano.

What was her first name?

Judith.

Oh, her husband's name was Julius?

No, her name was Judith.

Oh, Judith! OK.

Yes.

Judith Toledano, OK. And she was the widow of a counsel to Algeria?

Someplace. No, he was-- she was Algerian.

But she had married somebody who was a counsel from another country?

Yeah, very, very, very, very lovely home, fine linens. And she was very nice. She kept a kosher home. So she was my anchor in Oran. I would go there for Shabbos. I would go there periodically. And it became a [INAUDIBLE] with her. I mean, very, very nice.

She was the kind of woman that, every Friday, would give her concierge some money to distribute to the poor people. She was a lovely, lovely woman. And I got-- I knew the whole family. And so my time in Oran was a very good time. I got to know all those [INAUDIBLE] and [INAUDIBLE].

Did you stay in contact with them after the war?

Yes. Shortly. But it was-- lost track.

So when you finally got to Tel Aviv and you got to the camp, [Teletwinsky?], did you meet up with other chaplains who were supposedly in this group?

Well, in the first replacement depot when we landed, all the new people coming into North Africa just landing processed in that camp. And by that time when I was there, I was hoping that there would be a Jewish chaplain that I would be assigned to. Well, it so happened there were five Jewish chaplains arriving at one time. Resnikov, Baumel, who else?

They were a part of the--

Hochman. Jacob Hochman.

They were all part of the American army?

Yes. They were Jewish chaplains in the American army. And they were sent over to be distributed in the Middle East and to serve the soldiers. Now Hochman, it so happened that-- So I sent the chaplain a message saying, will I be able to be assigned to one of these chaplains? Well, I don't know who's going to be here. We don't know yet. And Jacob Hochman was assigned to Oran and I have pictures of him, I have all these pictures. And Hochman was [INAUDIBLE].

So I remember going to him in the early morning because I was to be shipped out to an ordinance depot as a clerk because I typed very well and all. But a friend of mine, a fellow who became very good friend of mine, from Rock Island, Illinois, he said, why don't you go to the chaplain and talk to him. Maybe he can get you assigned, get you scratched from this shipment? Because I was already on orders to go. So early morning I remember very well I went up to the battalion. I didn't want to go to the officer of the battalion, but I went. And I met Chaplain Hochman. I remember him very well. He had a steel helmet filled with water and he was shaving. He was shaving in the morning.

Where is this, in Tel Aviv?

No.

No, in Oran.

In Oran.

So this was after you got back from Palestine?

No. This was before. I told you I'd be--

It's OK.

But as these things come to mind--

It's important to say them. It's good.

So I asked him and he said, sure. Because I'd been conducting all those services. I'd been doing that.

Until he got there.

Until somebody else came. So he said if I would wait till I'm assigned, I will ask for you as my assistant. So meanwhile I had to get off of that list. Because I was scheduled to go. I was on orders.

You were scheduled to go where?

An ordinance depot.

But where, in North Africa?

Yeah. So I asked the chaplain, how can I get off that list I was on in the morning? He said the classification and assignment officers are the only ones that can do that. So I said, can you ask if they would put me on detached service to be held in Oran so that I would be here? So they took me off that list. And I know the person they put in my place. The name was Clooney. And I didn't know him. He didn't know me. And he was thrilled because he wanted that kind of a job.

So you got to stay with Jacob Hochman.

I got to stay. I was put on detached service and assigned to headquarters company in Oran. In [PLACE NAME], the camp there. So I stayed, and Hochman ordered this letter is signed and then I came. I want to show you these pages.

We'll look at them afterwards, OK? Did this happen after you came back from Palestine?

No.

It was before.

And was Jacob Hochman influential also in getting you to be able to go on that trip? Because you mention Estes,

Estes was the one. And I spent--

A week, two weeks?

A week and a half, I think. I was with Rabbi Herzog at that time, who was the chief rabbi, and it's all in the book, the Palestine thing is.

He was the chief rabbi of Palestine at that point.

Yes.

And there were other American chaplains with you? Or were you just alone?

I was alone.

And did you get to travel?

Yes.

How did you travel? Did you have an Army car?

No. I probably used civilian transportation.

Like buses, public buses? Yeah, public buses.

I know it's written in the book, but I would like to have you say some of your impressions. The British army was occupying it?

Yeah.

And how did the civilian population feel about that, the Jews?

I don't know. In Palestine I talked mainly with Jewish people because I had no work for the Army.

Well, you were on leave.

I'm was on detached service.

Task service?

Detached.

Detached service. Did most of the people speak English? Or did you speak to them in Hebrew?

Mostly spoke English, but I took advantage of they were always amazed Americans speaking Hebrew.

So after this trip you went back to Oran?

No. Prior to that trip, our unit, first replacement depot, was to be moved to Florence in Italy. And I was to go from-- And I would return to my unit and go to Florence.

You couldn't stay in Oran with Jacob Hochman?

No.

This time you had to go. I was assigned and Hochman had been assigned to another unit. But the whole camp was moved.

To Florence.

Yes.

So he went with you? Did he go to Florence too?

I went to Florence. I returned to my unit in Florence.

But Hochman stayed in Oran.

No, I think-- I lost him. He must have gone--

How did you get from--

I'm trying to think of how I got from Palestine to Florence.

You went straight from Palestine to Florence. You didn't go back to Oran.

No. Because all my equipment, all chaplains' equipment, Estes was wonderful. He signed on for all my equipment and made sure it got to Florence to the new camp. And I was with him again in Florence.

That's good. I bet you were glad to find him again.

It was very nice. He was a good man. And it's a little fuzzy, as you can understand.

That's OK. Let me see if I can ask you some questions. When you got to Florence, do you remember about what season it was?

Summer.

It was summer.

I remember I thought to myself, here I am coming back to the unit and I had had a wonderful trip and all these guys were living the Army life. So I thought, what can I bring them? What can I bring them that they would enjoy? In Cairo, at the officers' PX they had liquor. And I was able to buy a bottle of [? Shanley ?] Black Label. And I thought, I can take this by to the boys.

So when I came back to Italy, I came to my unit who were in tents. I got those paper cups, envelopes they used to drink water out. I said, you guys, everybody want to get in bed. And I remember I stood there and poured a little bit of liquor in each of those. It was a treat because they hadn't had liquor because they didn't have any liquor.

Was fighting going on when you were moved to Florence, or had Florence already been taken?

Fighting was over.

So what was your role there? Trying to think of what these-- I didn't do anything except help the boys.

Were their services at the camp in Florence too?

Yeah, sure.

What was the name of the camp? It was outside of Florence. Was it in the mountains? How long did you spend in Italy?

I spent a year and a half.

In Florence, or did you move around?

I moved around. I was sent to Rome, the Rome area command. In Rome I was very active.

What were you doing in Rome?

I was assigned to the chaplain section.

Oh, so you were active in your duties as a chaplain.

In other words, there was no Jewish chaplain. Hochman was the chaplain in Rome for a while, but then they-- I went to Rome and I had a marvelous experience.

Tell me about it.

There were so many Jewish things in Rome that I had freedom. And General Brown, who was the general in charge of Rome area. I had an office in Piazza Venezia.

In the Piazza Venezia?

Yeah. That's not very far from the Victoria Emmanuel Monument. And I recall seeing them in the hallway. And I mainly worked there with refugee people.

OK, so it may be as late as '44 at that point, or even later '45?

'44, '45. Because Roosevelt had died and Truman became the president.

What kind of things did you do with the refugees? They were Jews who had escaped from other countries?

Yeah.

Had any of them been in concentration camps?

Oh, yeah.

And you were trying to give them some semblance of--

I worked with UNRRA at that time, and I had an arrangement with one of the soldiers. A way of going in the Army that you can't depend on officers so you go to the enlisted men. The guy that works with you, that's the guy [INAUDIBLE]. So I had a connection with [? Robert Gold ?].

There were some displaced persons camps in Italy-- Dispacia in Spezia.

Ostia.

Ostia.

I'll show you something.

We'll look at it a little later and we'll take a picture of it. You have a picture of it?

At that time, Zolli, the Chief Rabbi of Rome, converted.

He converted to Catholicism.

He became a Catholic, yeah. They were a shattered community. So worked with those people. In Rome I lived in Alberigo Oriente.

Alberigo Oriente.

I was right around the corner from the Fountain of Trevi.

And how did you communicate with these people? Did you speak Yiddish to them?

Yiddish. I spoke Yiddish with them. Some of them. But I had so many incidences, fascinating.

For example?

I was living in the hotel. I was rooming with another soldier who was never there. He was always having a good time. I remember one night, late at night, I got a telephone call, Butler, a Jewish soldier has arrived. He has no place to stay. Could he stay with you? I couldn't allow that. I went and I got him and I remember I always had enough money to pass around because I would get money from the soldiers who wanted to help.

Jewish soldiers?

Jewish soldiers. And I gave him some money to go to find a place to sleep and come to Piazza Venezia in the morning, come to my office. And then I left orders that if anybody wanted to go to the chaplain's office, they should be allowed in. Because they weren't allowed in because it was Army barracks.

So I remember one, I have it written down someplace. I remember a boy came, a red-headed kid came after he slept the night, and we arranged to get a little bag from the Red Cross that had soap, shaving cream, and toothpaste and toothbrush that I would get for them. So this fellow came, a young boy, a Hungarian boy, he had come from-- He'd been in the Poland camps.

He came and I had had an arrangement with one of the soldiers, Sergeant O'Connor, Sergeant O'Connor, I remember, that if I would send somebody for help that he would give them a certain amount, give him some money to save. They have a package. They give them food. I remember I said, you go to this address. You go there and he'll give you a package of soap, shampoo, toothpaste, some food and some money because I had set it aside.

I remember there was a kid that became enraged. Said, it's a trick! It's a trick! You want to trick me! I'm going to go with this fellow, then I don't know where I'll end up. I'm not going to go to him.

He was so afraid because of his wartime experience.

He was afraid.

Did you accompany him?

No, I didn't. But I urged him to go. I helped him [INAUDIBLE]. I remember when Roosevelt died people streamed to our office. Like a shiva call. They came and cried. And I always had my folks who always sent me food. My mother always sent cookies and candy, and I was able to give these people some dulce, long some--

Sweet. So you stayed in Rome helping UNRRA. And do you remember May 8, 1945, the day that peace was declared, victory in Europe?

Was I in Europe?

Were you there?

I came back in February.

February of '45? You were discharged. You came back to Pittsburgh. And did you take up your playbill business with your brother again?

Yeah.

And you married your fiancée.

Yeah.

I was a fiancée at that time and we kept in touch the whole time. And so much so that I tell her, I says, so much has been

written and not written. There is that much more to be told yet.

So do you have anything you want to add about your experiences during the war or in Palestine? Do you remember following the War of Independence for the creation of the state of Israel?

Yeah, sure. I'll tell you an anecdote, and it's true. Back the 18th anniversary of Israel, every year in Pittsburgh we had a big celebration. And it used to be at the YMHA, Kauffman Auditorium. And I was the chairman of that the 18th anniversary gala. So-- What did I want to tell you? Oh yeah, so this incident is related, but one of the speakers at that celebration, I was the chairman, and then it was Rabbi Maurice Landis.

Maurice Landis.

He was a rabbi here in Pittsburgh. He was one of the speakers. The main speaker at that time was Herschel Schechter.

Herschel Schechter.

He was a very good friend of mine. It seems that working for the establishment of Israel, who before the vote came, which I remember very vividly--

At the UN.

UN. We tried every help possible way to get the opinion right so when the vote comes out those words would be correct. Well, at that time Haiti was the swing vote. And Pittsburgh had a newspaper called the Pittsburgh Courier. It was the premier black newspaper in country, in the world let's say. It was owned by a man by the name of Van. He was the owner. And Van had been appointed by Roosevelt to the Solicitor General's office, the first black to be appointed.

But his wife, Gussie? I forget her name. She became the owner of that paper. She was a very good friend of the ambassador to Haiti. So Mayor Lawrence at that time was the mayor of Pittsburgh who was very friendly with the black community and very good with the Jewish community. He was a Rooseveltian politician. He attended every dinner, every luncheon. He was very friendly with the black community too.

So he talked to Charlie Rosenblum-- Charlie Rosenblum come to him. Do you know the name Charlie Rosenblum? Very philanthropic. Charlie Rosenblum got to Mayor Lawrence and asked him to talk to Mrs. Van to get to the ambassador from Haiti. Rosenblum financed a trip between Mayor Lawrence and Charlie Rosenblum and Alex Orenthal. Alex Orenthal was associated with Charlie Rosenblum, but he was a very, very hardened Zionist.

The three of them flew to New York to the Waldorf Astoria, where the ambassador was living. And Mrs. Van went to bat trying to convince him. At the voting when they called to Haiti and Haiti voted yes, we knew it was in. I'll never forget that. That's a true sorry.

That was because of the concerted effort of Pittsburgh-- the mayor, Charlie Rosenblum, Lawrence Longfellow, and Jessie Van that they could convince--

I don't remember that her name was Jessie.

It was the wife.

And I was involved with the experience. It was a fascinating experience that we knew that-- That's a story that very few people have heard. I've told it to a number of Pittsburghers.

I didn't know that Haiti was a swing vote in that.

I don't know that it was a swing vote, but it was a good vote.

So is there anything else you would like to add about some of your experiences?

The experiences I had were magnificent.

Did some of the people you were in contact with emigrate when Algeria declared independence?

They left. I think when Ben Bella took over, everybody [INAUDIBLE] and then go to Marseilles, and then, I knew all these people. Wonderful, wonderful people. They were very good to me. And I had the whole kosher home so I could go to to eat. And the synagogue was my second home. It was a beautiful synagogue. I remember Friday evening the rabbi [INAUDIBLE] there's Yiddish expression, [SPEAKING YIDDISH] What the Christian community does, the Jewish community does too.

The rabbis wore a hat so they [INAUDIBLE] and the turned collar and all that. But the Friday night sure would be packed. A lot of kids would come. And the synagogue was built so there was a balcony where the rabbi sat. And everybody would go to kiss his ring, just like a Catholic.

Just like the pope.

Yes.

So this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Donald Butler on April 21 2012 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Thank you very much.