

Tuttle AMERICA 250 Transcript

Biographical Sketch: Frank Otis Tuttle (1912-2005) was born in Texas but eventually settled in Dothan, AL. He served in the US Navy SeaBees (Construction Battalion, 85th) in World War 2 as a refrigeration specialist, 2nd Class, stationed in Alaska and the South Pacific. He married Doris Burkett in 1939 (two children), worked at J.C. Penny, and opened Dothan's first fast food restaurant, Tut's Place, before World War 2. He owned and operated a refrigeration business in Dothan from the 1950s until his retirement.

00:00:00 Marty Olliff

Otis Tuttle was born in Sherman, TX in 1912 and moved to Dothan to work at the JC Penney Company. He took up an essential war job at the Panama City Shipyards in 1942, but in 1943 enlisted in the Navy rather than be drafted into the Army. He signed up for CB training, Naval Construction Battalion training, and eventually trained as a refrigeration specialist.

Assigned to the 85th Construction Battalion, Mr. Tuttle first went to Dutch Harbor, Alaska, then to the South Pacific Islands of Espiritu Santos and New Hebrides. He was on Wake Island on VJ Day and rotated home in November 1945.

Mr. Tuttle returned to Dothan and put his training to use, working for refrigeration and air conditioning companies before founding the Tuttle Service Company in 1954.

He retired in 1975.

In this 2003 interview with Marty Olliff, Mr. Tuttle tells the story of his enlistment, training in refrigeration, assignment in the Seabees, his time on Wake Island, and his return to the U.S.

In this first clip, Mr. Tuttle speaks about how he delayed getting drafted into the Army by taking an essential job, then by enlisting in the Navy and entering the Seabees.

00:01:26 Otis Tuttle

A friend came to him and said, "You're going to be drafted. Your number's in the line to come up pretty soon. If you go get you an essential job, then we can defer you."

And so I did, went to Panama City, got a job in the shipyard, **second year** apprentice and electrician. I stayed there about three months and thoroughly enjoyed the work.

After about three months, I got the letter from Uncle Sam to meet back up here for doctor's examinations. I told my leader went down there what the school was, and he says, "Why don't you go and join the CBs?"

I didn't know what the CBs were.

So I terminated down there on a Friday evening, knowing that when they took them through this examination, they took them down, put them in the bus, came to Fort Benning, or somewhere like that, and **took my own into** the Army.

I came home that Friday evening. I was married at that time, but anyway, I didn't tell anybody what I was fixing to do. I got up Saturday morning and went right down to the Navy recruiting office. Now mind you, this Army examination wasn't until Tuesday. I went down and I signed up for the Seabees.

00:02:42 Marty Olliff

The Seabees trained Tuttle in refrigeration, the specialty he followed for his naval and civilian career.

00:02:50 Otis Tuttle

Seabees is a construction battalion of the Navy. They had the reputation of going in and clearing the beaches in the South Pacific Islands anywhere so the Marines could go in and take the island.

I had been in there three days up there in Norfolk, and it was in February, and the weather was bad. And they were training us in the commando tactics of the Marines. We were having to go through those swamps.

Third day, we were up in the barracks. The weather was too bad to get out. And a fella came in, and he says, "I'm giving out cards. I want you to fill them out."

It was kind of like an application for a job.

He says, "If you know anything about diesel engines or refrigeration, you shouldn't put it down."

Well, I'd studied refrigeration a bit, but I had no experience in it. The next day, my name was posted on the bulletin board. We **booked** the next morning over to a building, and they were interviewing those men to pick out 12 to go to refrigeration school. I happened to be one of the lucky ones that they selected.

In the three years I was in the CBs, that's all I did with refrigeration.

After we finished this advanced training, it was about three months. We had a lot of military training there, and they had a large warehouse. They had a little piece of refrigeration equipment in there to study and to work on and to get the experience.

00:04:14 Marty Olliff

After training, Tuttle's first assignment was to Island X, which turned out to be Dutch Harbor, Alaska. And he was later deployed to Espiritu Santos and the New Hebrides Islands in the South Pacific.

00:04:30 Otis Tuttle

After my three months, they put us on a troop train, led us to Port Hueneme, California. And then we got our assignment, and we said, you're going to Island X. We didn't know then where Island X was. Nobody knew. Nobody had any scuttlebutters to know where they were going.

They brought a trip train in there and came to Seattle in about April of 1943. We loaded on a troop ship. They laid it out that we were going to Dutch Harbor, Alaska. After a year and a half there, they brought us home. We stayed about two months. We got assigned to go to South Pacific, down to Espiritu Santos, and the New Hebrides.

Well, they come in, and there's a ship out here that needed refrigeration work. They wouldn't even volunteer to go. I'd volunteer because I wanted to learn how to do it. I wanted to get the experience. And they'd be successful at it, too.

00:05:24 Marty Olliff

Tuttle's unit was on Wake Island preparing to invade Japan when Japan surrendered. He tells of his time there and having to convince stranded Japanese soldiers that the war was truly over.

00:05:38 Otis Tuttle

Well, all the way from the South Pacific, we came back to Wake Island. Now, imagine the war was over. We lived in Quonset huts in big coconut groves. Every morning, a lot of activities were done by a bugle, a loudspeaker system. And they had a regular bugler to do that.

That morning, the bugler, you talk about jazz and revelry, everybody said, "He's drunk. I wonder what's happened."

Well, it wasn't long we found out that they dropped the bomb on Japan. And Japan had surrendered.

There were four ships out in the harbor loaded, I mean they were loaded, for the 85th CB Battalion to make the invasion of Japan.

Wake Island had been destroyed by the Japs. There was a lot of Jap soldiers on the island. And their communications had been cut off and all. They didn't know Japan had surrendered. We had to tell them that Japan had surrendered.

When we came in, they thought we were going to treat them like they would have treated their enemy, but we didn't. They were hungry. We fed them right out of the same boxes that we got our food out of. And then they calmed down and got very sociable. Then after about two weeks, here came a Japanese hospital ship. They loaded those Japs **home until he hadn't carried them back and left it up to us.**

00:07:03 Marty Olliff

In this final clip, Mr. Tuttle describes his return to the U.S. for discharge.

00:07:10 Otis Tuttle

I stayed on that island about two months. Then the order came out that men of 36 years of age had enough points to go home be discharged. There was about 50 of us in that group.

We left Wake Island on one of the ships that we'd come up from South Pacific on and went into Portland, Oregon.