

**Edward K. Witherell  
Veteran**

**Mike Russert and Wayne Clark  
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on 2 April 2003  
Latham, NY**

**Q:** Could you give me your full name and date of birth and place of birth please?"

**EW:** My full name is Edward K. Witherell, and I was born in Eagle Bridge, New York on June the 30<sup>th</sup> 1922.

**Q:** OK, what was your education before you entered military service?"

**EW:** Well, I graduated from the old school in Eagle Bridge and we had about six grades I guess it was, then I went to Hoosick Falls for a grip of seventh and eighth grade and high school.

**Q:** OK, so when you heard about Pearl Harbor, do you remember where you were and your reaction to that?

**EW:** I was home in Eagle Bridge. I don't remember what day it was on but I think it might have been a Sunday morning, because I was helping our neighbor of mine had gone away and when he went away I always smoked his car for him. So, that's where I was.

**Q:** Do you remember what your reaction was when you heard about this?

**EW:** I was just, I can't remember what it was.

**Q:** Did you enlist or were you drafted?

**EW:** I was drafted.

**Q:** And did you, so you were assigned to the Army Air Force?

**EW:** Well, I asked to get assigned to get into the Air Force.

**Q:** Why did you want to get into the Air Force?

**EW:** Well, first, I wanted to be a fighter pilot, but my eyes were not good enough and so I went to radio school and gunnery school for the B-24.

**Q:** Alright, when did you enter service?

**EW:** Oh gosh, in November 27<sup>th</sup>, 1942.

**Q:** And where did you go for basic training?

**EW:** Fort Dix.

**Q:** So you went to your specialized specialty was radio school and gunnery?

**EW:** "Radio and gunnery, yes, went to radio and gunnery school.

**Q:** OK, did you train on any special one gun or would you move around to different turrets?

**EW:** No, it was all .50 caliber machine guns, that's all they had on the plane.

**Q:** Ok, do you remember anything about your basic training that you like to tell us about?

**EW:** No, nothing special about it.

**Q:** Ok, when did you join up with your crew?

**EW:** Gosh, I can't remember that one, I think I was in, after gunnery school but I'm not positive.

**Q:** That's ok, where did you pick up your plane?

**EW:** We picked up our plane, and I think it was Topeka, Kansas.

**Q:** What kind of plane was it?

**EW:** B24, and we flew it overseas.

**Q:** How did you fly it from where to where?

**EW:** I think we went through Africa and over land someplace over in Europe and then we went to our base.

**Q:** Where was your base?

**EW:** Lychee, Italy.

**Q:** What Air Force were you with?

**EW:** 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force, 98th Bomb Group.

**Q:** Did you keep the same plane all the time?

**EW:** No, we got over there with our plane and you know all crews fly different planes, and so we got there one day and your first mission they all have you split up, fly with experienced crew for one or two missions, and somebody else that had been there flew our plane and they got shot down on the first mission, so we lost our plane immediately, so two young ones didn't last too long.

**Q:** Who named the plane?

**EW:** The crew, we named it.

**Q:** Why did you name it that?

**EW:** I can't say how we made that name now.

**Q:** Maybe you could hold this up now (Gives picture) and look at it and hold it up to the camera. Now, your plane was silver rather than the green.

**EW:** Yeah.

**Q:** And that's the crew, did you stay with the whole crew the entire time you were in?

**EW:** Yeah, we lost one guy who was on a training mission.

**Q:** Now, where are you on that picture?

**EW:** I am on the right-hand corner there (taps on picture).

**Q:** Do you remember the names of the other fellas if you wanted to?

**EW:** I can't remember all but I got most of them here. My pilot was Briggs, my co-pilot was Palmer, navigator was Swanson, and Walter, he was a member of the crew, he was a bombardier, Gritty was the engineer and I was the radio operator and tap turret gunner,

and Phyllis was a gunner, and Moore was a gunner, and Conner was a ball turret gunner, and when we lost him at a training mission. That was a plus [unclear] trip.

**Q:** You said you lost him on a training mission?

**EW:** He was on a training mission with another crew. We went on a lot of different places in Europe.

**Q:** How long was your typical mission? Six hours? Eight hours?

**EW:** Eight, nine hours.

**Q:** You said that you had three missions, would you describe those?

**EW:** I didn't go on the one that was real bad, there was one that was low level and a lot of the planes got shot down. Now, we went over and there was one which was on August 17, 1944. Our engineer kept this and gave me a copy of it and it says on the bottom, "Hydraulic system shot out, electric line broke, wheels let down manually with parachutes for flats". So, when we land, we had to use parachutes to slow up. That was one of them, not the bad one, but the real bad one where they're low level, but this was a bad mission.

**Q:** You said you use parachutes to slow up, how did you do that?

**EW:** They let them out, the engineer did this, he left them out, I think out the side windows or doors or something.

**Q:** Would you have one on each side?

**EW:** Yeah, he said parachutes plural for flaps. Here's another one where we bombed the Anacostia, I had a lot of them but I brought these two. "Nulls fail, kicked out, left pilot brake booster hit and leaking fluid, and the bombardier was struck".

**Q:** Did you get hit with a lot of flak?

**EW:** At different times, we had engine shot out several times. Not shot out of the plane but stopped.

**Q:** So, you had contact with enemy fighters too?

**EW:** Oh yeah, we had a lot of those.

**Q:** What do you think was probably the worse raid that you went on?

**EW:** Probably the plus 2 ones, one of those.

**Q:** What were some of the other targets that you hit, I know you said you had 50 missions.

**EW:** Well, the last two to three times, and here's one where we went to the Anacostia, and went to Yugoslavia, several places there. Here's one my pilot sent me, we were stationed at Lychee, Italy. This was dated, I can't remember the date, I think it was written a few years ago, 95! November 1995. He wrote to a nurse if you wanted to read that, they're doing well.

**Q:** Maybe we can make a copy of it later.

**EW:** Okay. He went over there on a business trip and he came back over our base, Lychee, and he said, "Sitting on the right-side window seat, sure enough, he could see the entire boot of Italy and our 98<sup>th</sup> bomb group airdrome many years ago," And exactly 50 years ago, the day he went over, our bombing mission was to Yugoslavia.

**Q:** So, you guys fly with the heated flight suits?

**EW:** Yes, we had to because it was way below 0, we flew way up high. Most of the time, sometimes we were lower.

**Q:** Did you ever have any problem with your flight suit?

**EW:** No.

**Q:** Did you use a flak jacket at all?

**EW:** Yes. Always had to put a flak jacket on.

**Q:** Did you have rations with you aboard the aircraft?

**EW:** We took some things to eat.

**Q:** Did it freeze up on you?

**EW:** No.

**Q:** What kind of gloves did you wear working the radio? Or did you just have silk gloves or did you wear the heavy gloves when you were working the radio or the guns?

**EW:** Well, we had heavy gloves for the guns but when I put on the radio I had to take the glove off to use it, but we didn't use a radio during missions, on the bomb run, we didn't use a radio at all.

**Q:** Now, did your bomber have a bomb site on it or did it go off and follow the other planes?

**EW:** We had a bomb site, but I think most of the time the late plane did the bombing using the bomb site and then we dropped our bombs at that time.

**Q:** You said here that about one of your greatest experiences was running into a hometown friend, could you talk about that a little bit?

**EW:** Yeah, I have something in here about that, but I can tell you about it. I was born in Eagle Bridge, and I knew Eagle Bridge pretty well, he went into the Air Force.

**Q:** Who was that? What was his name?

**EW:** Fairbanks, Doug Fairbanks. I got a clipping from the paper where he was missing in action, and when I was overseas, we used to go swimming a lot in the Adriatic Sea. They took a big truck and they took a load of us down to the sea every day to go swimming every day we were free. So, I was walking up the beach one day, this was after the articles in the paper back home, and I ran into Doug and I was surprised because I thought he was dead.

**Q:** How did he get out of Yugoslavia because you said he was shot down?

**EW:** His plane crash-landed and he escaped through the underground. People helped him out and his crew.

**Q:** How long did it take him to get out?

**EW:** About six weeks.

**Q:** When you stayed in the service until 1945 did you go back to the United States as an instructor?

**EW:** No, I came back to the United States and they assigned me to a B-29 crew, not to crew yet but we went to school for B-29 radio operator. So, I joined a B-29 crew and we got ready to go overseas to Japan.

**Q:** How did being in a B-29 crew compare to being in the B-24 crew.

**EW:** I can't say but it was good, it wasn't bad.

**Q:** Now, the crew you were with on the B-29 were any of the guys the same?

**EW:** No, they were all a different group.

**Q:** What happened to the rest of your crew? Were you all split up when you were done?

**EW:** Yes, we were all split up.

**Q:** How did you feel when you heard of the death of President Roosevelt?

**EW:** What year did he die?

**Q:** He died just before the signing of the peace treaty in 1945.

**EW:** I remember it, of course, I felt bad about it but, nothing I could do about it. I was radio operator in the B-29.

**Q:** How did you feel when you heard about the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan?

**EW:** Well, that was in August I think, because we were flat set to go to the Pacific Theater in August. But when they dropped that bomb, they cancelled our trip, we didn't have to go. So, they sent us home shortly after that.

**Q:** So, there must have been a sense of relief then.

**EW:** It was.

**Q:** Did you join any veteran's organizations after you left the service?

**EW:** American Legion.

**Q:** Have you stayed in the American Legion at all?

**EW:** Well, I think I'm still in it I just forgot that up until last year I was still in it.

**Q:** Did you stay in contact with any of your crew?

**EW:** Most of them I did. Several of them are dead already.

**Q:** do you ever go to any reunions?

**EW:** No, I never went to the reunions.

**Q:** Do you still stay in contact with anyone?

**EW:** Yep, around Christmas time, I usually get a card from some of them.

**Q:** Did you ever use your GI Bill when you returned home?

**EW:** Yeah, I went to college, got my degree and used my GI Bill.

**Q:** Did you ever use that 52-20 Club at all?

**EW:** For a little while.

**Q:** How do you think your time in the service affected your life? Do you think it affected it in anyway?

**EW:** It probably did but I don't know how.

**Q:** You think you would have gone to college if it hadn't been for the GI Bill?

**EW:** I don't know because probably couldn't afford it. But, before I went to Sienna, before I went to service I wanted to Troy Business College and that's school is gone,

that's no more, but I went there for a year. I've done on the train every day from Eagle Bridge.

**Q:** Now, what was your rank when you were in the military?

**EW:** Text Sergeant.

**Q:** Okay, well, thank you for very much for your interview.

**EW:** Okay.