

**Frederick J. Capobianco
Veteran**

**Michael Russet, Wayne Clarke
New York State Military Museum
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on February 4th, 2003
In Tarrytown, New York**

Q: Could you give me your full name, date of birth, place of birth, please.

FC: Frederick J. as in Jason, Capobianco, C A P O B I A N C O. Date of Birth June 5th, 1922, I'm 80 years of age. I was born in Yonkers, New York.

Q: What was your education prior to entering the military sir?

FC: High school, and some college. I got a scholarship to New York University. But I was never able to complete it. But I didn't enlist I was drafted. I was 20 when I was drafted.

Q: How about telling us where you were when you first heard about Pearl Harbor, and what was your reaction to that?

FC: Well I was keeping company with a young lady, who ultimately became my wife. And I was at their home, it was a Sunday as I recall. For lunch, we used to call it a diner. And we heard, I heard, over the radio that day. My reaction immediately was I was stunned. Because we thought everything was going well with the peace talks. But it was quite a shock. I did not think about how it was going to affect me at all. I figured I'd probably be involved but you know. That wasn't my thought I was just concerned about what happened in Pearl Harbor, the loss of life and all that stuff.

Q: So you were drafted?

FC: Drafted, November 1942.

Q: How did you end up in the Air Force?

FC: Well, I think when I was drafted I went up to camp in Long Island. It was November of 1942. And they gave me a battery of tests and I guessed I scored pretty well. I had no background with communications or gunnery or anything of that sort. They just sent me to an aerial gunnery school Sioux Falls South Dakota. And I took a radio communications, so Sioux Falls I graduated from there, and immediately after that I was transferred to the aerial gunnery school in Laredo Texas. Right over the border, right on the border. There is an overlay right across the border. And from there, we were assigned to a crew, and I shipped out to a place in Washington called Moses Lake. It was in the dessert up there. And I met my crew, Pilots, Co-Pilots, Bombardier, Navigator, Waste Gunner, Engineer, Base Gunner, Tail Gunner, the whole crew, and we trained there.

Q: What kind of planes did you train on?

FC: With B-17s, and I was a radio operator gunner. We did our training there we flew all over the Northwest. Then we came east and we flew our own plane over England. And we had a long Journey across the country; we stopped at Stockton, Okra, Illinois, Ohio, and Newfoundland. From there we took off for England. With our plane, and with our crew. We arrived in Air Presto England with our crew. And from there we were assigned to a base in England. I didn't stay they too long, and from there I came to the 351st in a place 60 miles west of London. And that is we're I did my tour duty, 30 missions.

Q: Were you with the same unit the entire time?

FC: All the way through, the whole crew finished intact. The only one guy that had an injury was I, I had my flying suit, they were electrically heated because we flew at a high altitude. 33,000 ft. and it's pretty cold. I suffered from frostbite and I missed the mission. So my crew was always a mission ahead of me and they finished ahead of me, by one mission. I had to fly the last mission with a strange crew, and I was pretty quiet worried about that. But I made it.

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

FC: Yup!

Q: Was yours a painted B-17, or was it the aluminum?

FC: It was painted, triangle J was our number.

Q: Did you ever decorate the nose or name your plane?

FC: Yah, the name of the plane was Maggie's Drawers.

Q: I don't know if I want to ask where that came from.

FC: I don't know! I really don't. I think it was the pilot that named it he was a southern boy.

Q: Did you have a lady painted on it?

FC: Yah yah, must have been Maggie right?

Q: Did you ever decorate your jackets at all?

FC: Yes, with the same thing we had on our plane we had on the leather jackets. It was done across the back.

Q: Do you still have your jacket?

FC: I gave it to my grandson he still has it. Yah he's in Seattle Washington right now. But he got a lot of good use out of it. Still wearing it.

Q: Why don't you tell us about your missions out of England.

FC: Well primarily we spent most... our flags were over France, Germany, Poland, and that's it. The ones over Germany were the toughest we had tremendous loses. We'd send up 1,000 planes and, God we lost 100 bombers ever mission, with 8, 10 men on them. The most difficult mission was to Schweinfurt Germany. It's a ball bearing... Ball bearings are very important in the scheme of thing.

Q: What made the mission so difficult?

FC: Well it was the fighter opposition we had. The Luftwaffe. Very interesting, my first mission was in 1943, in December. And at that time we

had very little fire escort. They'd take us across the channel, and then leave us alone. It was very difficult because there was a lot of anti-aircraft. The Luftwaffe was in its prime at that time. Then as the missions progressed we had fire escort further in. In fact they took us to Berlin on two occasions, in March of 1944. I can remember all these things very vividly.

Q: What kind of fighters went up with you?

FC: Well it was spitfires from the British air force, and the American planes were the P47-Thunderbolt, and that was a twin-engine plane, and the P38 that's it. They had the greater range.

Q: Do you want to tell us about some of your missions, you said you were in the first daylight raid in Berlin?

FC: Yah in March, it really went very smoothly, we were scared hell. You know they used to take you into a briefing room with a big easel and a calendar, you know with a shade and they roll the thing up. And you see the arrow pointed at Berlin, and a lot of guys were shook up, because it was their first daylight raid in Berlin. The British went every night there, and their losses were tremendous. But the most vivid mission was this one, which wasn't supposed to be, on New Year's Eve, December 31st 1943. It was supposed to be, we were going to the southern part of France, in a very roundabout way and to, what's the big seaport down there? And we met opposition as soon as we got across the channel. And we had fire escort, not too far. Tremendous anti-aircraft all the way through, there was no let up. We were in the air like 12 hours, and we had to come back by a certain route. Over the sea we lost an engine and we were about to lose a second. Over the radio I heard the pilot, co-pilot talking, they thought they would have to ditch into the North Sea. It be no picnic, but by the grace of God, we found England coming up over the North Sea. And we landed in the base, which Jimmy Stewart was the commander.

Q: What kind of targets were you after?

FC: Most of the times they were ammunition factories, railroad yards.

Q: How about this raid into southern France what were you after there, a seaport?

FC: Yah, shipping and stuff, but we very seldom every went after civilians with anti-personal bombs. Manufacturing... This place Schweinfurt that I mentioned, we went there numerous times, I went there twice, but most of it was on the ground, we did very little damage as it developed. They were manufacturing the ball bearings.

Q: Now when you said you were coming back across the North Sea you lost your engine. You ended up at the air base where Jimmy Stewart was colonel, could you tell us a bit about that?

FC: Well it was by luck, we were able to make the English coast coming over the North Sea because we had one engine gone, and one about to go on the other side. They can operate with two engines, but if two go on the same side, its bad news. But our pilot was effective enough, and get us back and we had, it wasn't a crash landing but an emergency landing. Luckily we found the base, because it was a day like this with a lot of fog. But it was late it was almost midnight when we got there, and we left about 10 o'clock in the morning. We were in the air an awful long time, and he came out to pick us up in his Jeep, Colonel Jimmy Stewart, and he piled us in, he took us to the dining hall and we had our breakfast, then we drove and got into our plane, and there were no repairs they had to make just bullet holes from anti-aircraft, and we brought it back to the base in Colebrook and nobody was injured, nobody. In fact we had a very lucky crew in that respect, the only half ass injury was my toes, frozen toes.

Q: You're wearing the Distinguished Flying Cross, here.

FC: That's awarded for completing the mission. When I first went over there the required missions you had to complete before you were relieved of duty was 25, when I was halfway through they increased it to 30 so we were thinking that's what we're gonna get with the last 5 missions. But we made it, the whole crew made it; in fact, they all finished a mission ahead of me like I told you. So if you completed your tour of duty you get the DFC, plus the air medal with 3 clusters, which is what I got. The AFC paid me a total of 2 dollars every month extra, so that was an ample reward I guess. But you

know I think about it cause I see movies and of the air raids from England and I don't know how we lived through it, it was terrible, and the losses were horrendous, a lot of them. We were young kids in our twenties, and I was drafted into this thing too, nobody asked if I wanted to fly. My first flight was in AT training where the pilot is in the front and I was in the back with a machine gun shooting at a target, it was my first time in a plane! So you learn things.

Q: You were, did you also serve as a gunner you said you were trained

FC: Yah because I got a gun in my position I was right in the middle, beyond the bomb bay in the B-17. And there was a little radio room there and the gun was there right above where I operated from.

Q: So you were a turret, tap turret kind of, did you every fire at German aircraft at all?

FC: Sure yah, we had some hits, it wasn't from me. Our waist gunners were sharpshooters, and we had a tail gunner that was very good he had a couple of kills. The German air force they were real good opponents, they used to come out in front at the whole formation, and they were very experienced, But they lost a lot too. In the end they has a tough opposition because they were running out of fuel. That's when things started to get easy, but we had a tough time. I finished up in May of 1944, and I was leaving England on D-Day. That's when everybody was up in the air. The put every available plane in the air that day, and I was on my way out on a plane to Northern Ireland, and they kept me there for about 3 months, training new crews and had a wonderful time because they were having steak and eggs for breakfast so the Irish were great. And it was nice Irish countryside, all green and rained every morning but that's why it was green there. Had a good time then. So that was my um...

Q: Have you been in contact with the fellows?

FC: I've tried, a lot of, a couple have died, I see one regularly, he lives in New Jersey. He was the tail gunner, George Middle his name is, and there was one up in New Haven, Connecticut, Frank Matola, I haven't heard from

him in years. I don't know what's happened, he was pretty sick when he left you know. He was going out on disability too.

Q: Do you belong to the Eighth Air Force Association?

FC: Yah the Distinguished Flying Cross Association, the Eighth Air Force Historical Society, and the three fifty first bomb group alumni.

Q: You were saying there was a story?

FC: About that mission yah written up by another crew, they go through the whole deal here. It brought back very good memories of, see the mission 31st December, 1943, and it starts on this page two. But I get this every month, you know we paid dues, and have reunions which I haven't attended every the States, this group.

Q: Do you have any other pictures there that you wanted to show us? Your I.D. Card?

FC: Yah I got than down in Laredo.

Q: Now how old were you in the picture?

FC: Well, let's see, June 12th, 43, I was born in 22, so 21. I got some other pictures they're from newspaper clippings. My job prior going into the service I worked for the newspaper chain in Westchester County, I was a circulation manager, I was hailing kids, of course I was young I was only 18 years of age, these young kids that delivered, you know, train them, replaced them when they left and stuff. I think I left them all home. I have pictures of taken in England with the crew together and stuff, in fact I have one in my office of the whole crew.

Q: Did you ever use the G.I. bill after you returned?

FC: No.

Q: How about the 52-20 club?

FC: No, I was very foolish. What happened was, when I returned to the States after my missions, they gave me a 30 day leave it was for rest and rehabilitation because I was in my way to the Civic Theater to fly B-29's,

that was all outlined, and they came and dropped the bomb. But, and I got married then, and so when I got discharged my wife was expecting, I think the child was born about a month after I was discharged and I had to go to work, but I could have gone to school and stuff at 9, but I didn't do it. I was a good student, I really blew it. Cause I had little direction, I came from a family, and they always had problems with money and depression kids, so it wasn't easy. But I guess you read, Brokaw's book, *British Generation*, I found that very interesting. That's my story