

**Clinton Alford Lang  
Veteran**

**Michael Russert with comments by Wayne Clarke  
New York State Military Museum  
Interviewers**

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New York State Military Museum  
Saratoga Springs, NY**

**Clinton Alford Lang: CAL  
Michael Russert: MR  
Wayne Clark: WC**

**MR:** Mr. Lang, would you tell us your full name, your address, and where you live?

**CAL:** Clinton Alford Lang. 124 Brookline Road Ballston Spa, NY 12020.

**MR:** What can you tell me about your pre-war education?

**CAL:** I went through high school with a graduate of the [unclear] in 1939.

**MR:** When were you born?

**CAL:** November 4<sup>th</sup> 1920.

**MR:** Did you have any jobs before the war?

**CAL:** I worked for a cattle dealer for about three and a half years on the farm and I was deferred on a kind of working on the farm and also he was a cattle dealer and I hauled cows at night. But then, September 8, 1942, I decided to quit and went and joined the Marine Corps.

**MR:** Where were you when you found out about Pearl Harbor?

**CAL:** I was where I lived in Ballston Spa with a family where I was working. I just couldn't believe what I was hearing to think about it. The days went on and just so after about eight or months of it I decided that I'd go myself.

**MR:** Why did you pick the Marine Corps?

**CAL:** Well I don't really know. [Laughs] I heard a lot about it and everything. I knew nobody that was into it, but I just decided that I was going to join the Marine Corps, that's all.

**MR:** You didn't have any friends that went with you?

**CAL:** Nope...I went alone. In fact, I shipped out of Albany, NY on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1942 and there were eight other fellas from the vicinity went at that time... Parris Island, South Carolina.

**MR:** Ok, why don't you tell us about your basic training?

**CAL:** Well I mean it was a whole different story. You're down south and we had quite a few southerners that were drill instructors and I thought they picked on the northern fellas and everything like that and I felt sorry for some of the fellas that came out of New York City and everything because they never wore a pair of work shoes or anything and they used to end up with terrific blisters and they were never in such hot weather as that. I had come right out of the cornfield, so the drill instructor used to say to me "boy, are you sick? You're not sweating," and I didn't say a word.

**MR:** Where else did you receive your basic training? Was it just in—

**CAL:** I went up to Camp Lejeune in New River, North Carolina for rifle training and there I ran into a little bit of a snag because I was strictly a left-hander and they had one rifle that had recoil that goes past your nose if you fire it from your left shoulder. I had problems of this once before when I went to first grade to school because the teacher wanted to make a right-hander out of me, but my mother kind of fought it and decided that I was a left-hander and I stayed a left-hander

**MR:** Now I noticed you were with the Marine Air Wing. How did you end up with that?

**CAL:** We were in Parris Island for four weeks. We went up to Camp Lejeune for three weeks for the rifle training. At the end of that three weeks there was this Corporal who was our drill instructor at the time, kind of the head one. He picked seventeen out of seventy-five. He said, "You guys are going to Marine Air Core." I never knew anything about Marine Air Core. So, some of the guys were kind of grumbling about it and this and that and he [drill instructor] says "fellas"—he was a heck of a nice guy—"don't grumble. You guys are getting the best break there is. Not only that, you're going to have fifteen schools to pick from. You're not going to be assigned to a school, you're going to pick the school you think you want." So that kind of quieted that down and the next day we went to Cherry Point, North Carolina. We got there at Cherry Point, so we figured we would shortly go into school, but they put aside mess duty for a month [laughing].

Then we went to Jacksonville, Fl—I picked Mechanic School because I figured I would get along maybe the best in that. So, I went to Jacksonville, Florida and got down there... [pauses] another month of mess duty. So, I served that and then I guess it was shortly after Christmas of 1942 we started in school. We were there until the following June. We got back, went back up to Cherry Point and they

were forming what they called VMSB 343, which is a Marine Scope Bombing Squadron. So that was—

**MR:** What kind of planes did they use?

**CAL:** Douglas Dive Bombers we trained with. They were old planes and the first thing you know they sent us out and we started at Atlantic Field, North Carolina and that's just as far as you can get on the Carolina coast out to the ocean and there was nothing. I mean nothing there. We stayed there a few months or so and then they shipped us down to Greenville, North Carolina. It was an airport for Greenville, but the Navy and stuff was taking over some of these bases like that or airfields. We lived on one side of town and they used to truck us to the other side of town every day. And we trained there and one time I came home shortly after we were there for three, four months. I come home on a furlough. And my mother hands me a telegram [from Marine Corps] for me to return at once. So, three o'clock in the afternoon I get a train to go back. Got back there early the next morning, packed a sea bag, and our planes were already up in... [pauses] Virginia and so what happened then is they called it off because they said that the Army— this is the explanation they gave to us— the Army didn't want the Marine Core over to help the invasion from Sicily. See we had been training to work a border carrier...[pauses] so we just went right back. I unpacked the sea bag, went back to work for same thing I had been doing for quite a while and we stayed there for—

**MR:** What was that, that you were doing?

**CAL:** Well, working on planes and I had my own plane, but if there was a special deal having to be done on to it, we had like a carburetor specialist or prop specialist. They took care of that part. But we had to get the plane ready and assigned for a pilot that was alright to fly.

**MR:** What were some of the things you went through to inspect a plane like that?

**CAL:** Well, one of the most important things is that before you try and start that plane, you always pull that prop through. So, if there was any on the cylinders, was any oil into them, it kind of lubricated it. Another thing was you always drained the bottom of the carburetor out. Start it up so that it had two mags into it and see how much difference there was of those mags dropping down from shipping them one to the other.

**MR:** When did you finally go overseas?

**CAL:** I went overseas, and we were there until about August or September of 1944. Then we went to Camp Miramar in California, which we were there about two to three weeks I would say. Then they put us on a small carrier that was taking a bunch of things to the Hawaiian Islands. So, we were five or six days aboard ship and we got over there and they give us all brand new when we got to Hawaii. They unload us at Pearl Harbor and they put us in a camp called "Ewa." Rather, I called it "Ewa." "E, W, A" was the way they spelled it. The Curtiss

Helldiver had just come out about then, which was a new type of dive-bomber. We got twenty-one of those and so we kind of give them the working over and work them out a bit and then our pilots took the planes the flew them to Midway which is 1100 miles. There is a little [unclear] they call it and I can't tell you what the name of it is, but some of them had to land there because they were afraid of running short of fuel. Then we got down there, and we were supposed to go down there. They were supposed to send us down there for six months. Well, six months comes, and we are still there, but they shifted off— the island that we were on first, the day we landed down there, I'm looking out... They shipped all of the mechanics and the rest of the people that was in our squadron by air. I am looking out to see where we're landing because you couldn't very well see it and we just come in over the ocean, the wheels almost hit the water and we went to the other end and the wheels were almost in the water again there. And we were there for—I would say on that island for six months and we walked across three times a day to eat. What they had there...they had out of coral like three sides of it build up about twenty-five or thirty feet. Single planes were built in there. And we had a place probably about 8x8 for a double bunk and one man was with the planes at all times.

This was just built right in there. We had cockroaches. We used to set the legs of the bunk in the hydraulic fluid, so the cockroaches wouldn't get up in the bed. [Laughs] Well if you left a pack of cigarettes out, they would be empty by morning. I don't know what they did with the tobacco, but it would be empty. And then they moved us over to what they call I think it was Sand Island, which was a bit bigger and we stayed there. We thought we were going to get out of there, but they kept us right there for thirteen months all together. Got aboard ship in August or September. Whenever they signed the armistice with Japan, we were halfway between Midway and...[pauses] the Hawaiian Islands. So, we got back to Hawaii and we were there for a while and we got all new clothes and everything and we would come back on the old aircraft carrier of Saratoga to Treasure Island. They had changed that over in to a tube ship. The bunks were three high on the hangar deck and I mean you walked sideways there and you were glad to have a spot. You get up in the morning, you would start standing in line to go to the bathroom. You get out of that line, you stood in the line to get something to eat, and you got in another line to maybe go back and shave or something like that. By that time, it would be time to eat lunch, so you would get in line. But, it was continuously the whole day time you were standing in line. We were two days going from San Francisco to San Diego—there were no bunks on the train, you just set up in seats and then we were down there, and we didn't do too often much. We were maybe around there a week, ten days, or something like that and then most of us got thirty-day furlough's so I came home, but there was one lieutenant in charge of about seventy guys. He said, "I don't care what you guys do from here to Chicago, but I want seventy men when we get in Chicago, I want to take a [unclear] roll. We would be taken through these little western

towns. The train would slow down because—they would even put us on the [unclear] to let a freight train go by. But, you see, there would be a sign where there was a beer garden or something. A guy would get a six pack or something and bring it on the train. Lieutenant never said a word. We got to Chicago in about three days I guess it was and he called a roll and he had seventy men. He thanked us all [laughing].

So, we went from there. He gave us our paperwork for our thirty-day furloughs, so I came home and then after the thirty days I went back to Cherry Point. So, for three, four days I wasn't doing much. Well finally I guess they caught up with me or something, so they sent me down to Stallas Hut, and there was a lieutenant there or 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant—nice fella—and a Corporal in there that had probably been in service six months, but he had worked for the Goodyear Tire Rubber Company scene. So, I walked in there—of course I was a Tech Sargent—and the lieutenant, the first thing he says to me is “why in hell did they send a Tech Sargent down here!? All I got is a Corporal!” I said, “Lieutenant, don't worry about it. I am just waiting my time out because in about two months I am going to be out of here I hope.” “Well,” he says, “I am glad you feel that way about it.” So, he introduced me to this fella— and he was a nice fella and everything. So, he told the Corporal right out, he said “if guy doesn't want to do anything, so let him be.” So, we used to sort tires [laughs]. So, finally after the 1<sup>st</sup> of February, they sent a bunch of us up to Bainbridge, Maryland and there is where I was discharged from. I was there about two, three days and that's...

**MR:** When you were assigned to Midway with the air squad, what did they do there?

**CAL:** Well see, that was a subbase down there and when those subs would be coming in there we use a dawn, and a patrol, and one at twilight—maybe five o'clock in the afternoon we would go out and send two planes out for a couple of hours to bring a sub in or see what was going on and kind of looked the situation all over

**MR:** So, you worked on the same plane all the time?

**CAL:** Yes. I was the chief mechanic. I was what they call a plane captain.

**MR:** What were some of your duties as a plane captain?

**CAL:** Well, I had to make sure that that plane was ready to fly at all times. If not, turn it over to the main engineering department and I had one man with me.

**MR:** Did you ever go up in one of the planes?

**CAL:** Oh yeah! Not over there because they had their own rear-seat gunners with them see, but here in the states, to draw flight pay—which was fifty percent of your base pay— you put four hours a month with them, but they used to ring you out a little bit. We had a few guys. Oh, they used to love to get the guys there to go

because they would overshoot the target a little bit and then kind of bend that thing back again [laughing]. But they were good guys. Well see, back in the states we had a couple of captains. One of the guys that was assigned to our outfit in the states had been at the Battle of Midway. I can't tell you his name offhand, but he had made a direct hit on a Japanese ship there. I mean he dropped it right down the smoke stack. And he got up there in front of these guys when we were training in the states and he told the rest of the pilots and they had a whole meeting. Right in front of all the enlisted men, he told these pilots, "don't ever forget it, your life depends on these guys. So, don't think that you're better than they are!" And I mean there was an awful change in a lot of those guys. I mean they thought that they had a whole other world and everything, but nobody said anything anymore, but just that one time because this guy knew what he was talking about and he could take and do anything, and I think if he talked a little bit more to the planes, he could've had them talking.

**WC:** Did you get to run out any of the planes yourself? Run the engines—

**CAL:** Oh yeah! That was one of the main things. Every morning that was the first thing. You run that plane. I mean it used to feel like you would like to release the brakes or pull the chocks a little bit. [Laughs]

**WC:** You didn't get to taxi it or anything?

**CAL:** Oh yeah, now and then a little bit.

**MR:** What did you do after you left the service? When did you get married?

**CAL:** I got married in 1952.

**MR:** Do you have any children?

**CAL:** I had one daughter. She died in 1967

**MR:** What kind of work did you do after the war

**CAL:** Well, I went back for a cattle dealer for about twenty years or approximately twenty years. Well, I used to take them up to Cambridge. There was one time for twenty years I don't think I missed one or two Tuesday nights out of [unclear]. Do you know them?

**MR:** Yes.

**CAL:** Then I decided—well I was forty-six years old at the time—well maybe I better get a job where I where I will get a pension or something like that. So, I- a fellow that had the Mayflower Agency in Schenectady, McCormack Sidewalk Transportation. I went down there, and I knew him and everything— the son-in-law ran the business at the time— so I asked him "so, you got any room for anybody?" because I knew him pretty well. He said, "you want to come in to work and work in the warehouse?" I said, "it's alright with me." So, he says "well I can't hire you, if you haven't quit your job yet." I said, "I have already given notice for

this next week.” He says “alright, I will put you to work Monday morning. So, I go down there and for a while I was...[pauses] I was working in the warehouse storing furniture. Now all of a sudden the dispatcher come out one night to me and he says “how would you like to go down to Delaware with a pickup truck with a 600lb motor out of GE? They need it down there.” So, I said “well I guess so. So, I went down there and so that was about the end of my work in the warehouse because then I was on to small trucks for a while which I was used to and everything and one time I had a pass to get into Knolls Atomic Lab in West Milton just like a lot of the workers did.

In fact, I got up to West Milton one time I was there getting a load of stuff and a guy comes along and says to me “so what are you doing down here? Where’s your guard?” I said, “I don’t need one.” He said, “yes you do.” So, he marches me right back up to the gate and there was this big fella that I knew, and he sees us coming, laughing unlike anything! And so, the guy explains “what’s this man doing down there?” He says “well, I will tell you, he’s got just as much right down there as you have.” [Laughs] Well, that kind of crooked this guy’s goose a little bit. So, I went back there, and I drew a lot of them and I used to run all up and down the coast, drew waste down to South Carolina, where the U.S government owns 100,000 acres down there in the Savannah River project. I don’t know, you probably see pieces in the paper about that. I have been in there several times and see we used to haul out a lot of these power plants around here. Well, anywhere is from here—I have hauled out with a trailer out of Iowa and out of Michigan. One time I left here on a Friday morning, go down to Towns River, New Jersey, load a trailer. Sat there all day never did a thing. So, four o’clock in the afternoon I called up. I said “what do you want me to do? Wait until tomorrow? They claim they’re going to load this trailer tomorrow. Do you want me to stay here and load it?” “No, you just drop your trailer there and bobtail it to South Carolina and pick a trailer up. How about on a Monday be up in Midland, Michigan?” I said, “I’ll do the best I can.” Monday morning, I call them. I say “I’m 100 miles from Midland, Michigan. I got loaded up there—that was kind of a power plant where you backed in and they close the door in front of you. They raise one up in back of you and you backed in the length of the trailer.

Then a guy, he takes a chain he puts around the clutch and up through the steering wheel and puts a padlock on top. He says “I need to have your keys and then you and I got to go out in the [unclear] while they load the trailer because I had one of these big castes out that they used to put fifty-gallon drums into. So, went out there and well about three hours I guess they had it loaded so I started for South Carolina. Got down to South Carolina and unloaded and—that was nice down there because you just drove in there to South Carolina, checked in, and they take your truck, the whole business and take it back in there and unload it so you never saw what was going on. [Laughing] So when it got all through, I would call up... “where do you want this trailer to go?” “Well, we want it go up in to

Iowa.” So, I said “okay,” went to Iowa and come down—this is right in April, and I can’t tell you what year it was, but I ran right into a snow storm on a Sunday afternoon—and coming down that interstate there twenty-six, I mean there were more cars in the ditch than there were on the road. [Laughing] So, I found the place where I could get off. I figured I would find a motel, see, but there was no motel around and I didn’t have a sleeper. I had a board to put on the two seats and I had a furniture pad, and a lot of fuel. 9:00 at night I just laid back in there and went to sleep I guess. I heard a rap on the door, looked out and there was a trooper there. He says that someone reported that there were truckin’ problems here. I said “nope, I stopped before I got in any problems.” But you know, if I would have had nerve enough to go three or four more miles and go down and get down that island the grass was green. [MR and CAL both laughing]

**MR:** Do you remember when you heard about the atomic bombs being dropped on Japan and what your reaction to that was?

**CAL:** ...Well...I don’t really remember...about it, but I guess that probably was that we might have figured this thing has got to be over with pretty shortly.

**MR:** How would you say your service effected or changed your life? Did it in anyway?

**CAL:** Well, I don’t know. I come back and like I say I worked in the...hauling cows again and I had lived on a farm all my life. I don’t know I guess I figured I would never get off of it and back then even, after the war, a lot of guys were coming out of the service and jobs weren’t that plentiful. You were kinda glad to take anything that you could get...anything decent. When I went down to the city to work, I had good guys that I worked for and everything and I was happy with them and I don’t know, maybe I made it easier for myself because if there was a—well of course we had to go union because we were drawn into so many of these projects out of Schenectady GE see. I know it first started happening when we were drawn over to Connecticut and they were building a power plant over there and they were having to hire a guy for eight hours to ride with our driver into the plant. The fella that owned the—he says, “we can’t stand that. We got to do something.” So, he comes out and says, “what about you guys with the union and everything.” So, we all say, “well, if we gotta we gotta.”

Then it got to the point where if they wanted to—well, say like us three and we had about ten drivers. If you were the top man and had the most time in, if there was some kind of a job or something come up, you had to call, or you could turn it down. It comes to you [CAL points to MR], you could turn it down and they couldn’t do anything about it. This guy who was our dispatcher, well he kinda was a whatcha call it—the guys that he knew didn’t have to turn it down. Say like he knew you guys would always turn him down, it got to the point where he didn’t even bother to call you. If they hollered about it a little bit., he would say, “well I tried to call you, your line was busy, I had to get the job going.” Because our



company— they could have a truck in there within five minutes and they had a pretty good hookup with the fellas that were in the shipping department that sometimes they used to stall a little bit! They KNEW that this job had to go, but they would wait because I imagine they were a little kickback...I don't know.

**MR:** Have you joined any veteran's group after the war?

**CAL:** No.

**MR:** Never? —

**CAL:** No...I tell you what. I retired in 1984 and there was the fella that had been my dispatcher for eight, ten years, or had run the company after they had sold out, and he started his own company and my buddy, and I used to run the small truck. We went down to—well I'll tell you what we did one time. We took a five-gallon pale of samples to a laboratory in Los Angeles...two drivers. All for two drivers. We went to Bremerton, Washington with stuff out to the navy base out there. We went to Idaho Falls—they got a place in Idaho Falls. When you leave Idaho Falls, its forty miles west of there. You don't want to have to buy gas you don't want to have to eat because its back there in the mountains and there's nothing.

**MR:** Do you have anything else you want to tell us about your military service?

**CAL:** Not that I—the only thing I can say is I was probably a lucky guy because I never saw any action or anything like that, but it was a good experience.

**WC:** Have you kept in touch with any of the fellas you were in the service with?

**CAL:** Well, in the last ten or twelve years they've had a reunion, but I've never been to it, but they've written a book. I maybe should've brought the book along and let you guys—are you around here most every day?

**MR:** Yes.

**CAL:** Someday when I come up to Saratoga I'll bring the book and I'll show you—because prior to the [unclear]. I went to Japan, but I'll show you in the book where I left off.

**MR:** Yeah, so we could—

**CAL:** [Laughing] They've got a few things that are a little raunchy because my wife, one day she says, "what about so-and-so, I wonder if they would like to read the book." I said, "well—it was some friend of hers— I don't know about that because it tells about this one guy...how this one woman joined the Marine Corps and went out to Atlantic Field (NC) and she was going to make every Marine out there and I said, "I don't know whether...[laughing]

**WC:** It was a little raunchy then. [Laughing]

**CAL:** To some people it would be, but I'll be glad to take and let you if you want to read it, I'll show you where the end of it is. You might be interested in it

**WC:** We could probably photocopy some of the pictures—

**CAL:** There are all kinds of pictures Ill—well, it tells about this one guy that's on the news there...usually on 6:30. Not...[pause] Well, anyway he says that that's the greatest generation—

**MR:** That's Tom Brokaw.

**CAL:** Yeah, alright. He [Tom Brokaw] says, “them guys, they left their jobs”—and you've maybe read some of his stories because I know what I did is that I had the book and everything and I don't know, I found out that he had written a book or two so I high-tailed myself up to Ballston Library and got the book and read it.  
[Laughing]

**MR:** Well, thank you very much for your interview. That was good.