

**Vincent "Jim" Bochetti
Veteran**

**Wayne Clarke
New York State Military Museum
Interviewer**

**Interviewed on 7 May 2010 at
Maplewood Manor
Ballston Spa, New York**

Q: Maplewood Manor in Ballston Spa, New York. My name is Wayne Clarke from the New York State Military Museum in Saratoga Springs. Sir, for the record would you please state your full name and date and place of birth please.

JB: Vincent James Bochetti. Born in Mechanicville, New York.

Q: What year were you born?

JB: 1924

Q: Did you attend school in Mechanicville?

JB: No. Stillwater.

Q: Stillwater. Did you graduate from high school?

JB: No. They gave me my diploma. I enlisted in my senior year. I enlisted in the Air Force.

Q: What year was that?

JB: 1942.

Q: Let me ask you. Do you recall where you were when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor? Usually, most people were either at a ball game or at a movie or they heard it on the radio.

JB: It was on a Sunday. I remember that. We were kids. We were playing ball. We were out playing ball.

Q: Once Pearl Harbor was attacked, did you see any changes immediately as to what life was like back then for you? Were there a lot of people going into the service?

JB: Yes. A lot of my friends were going into the service. They enlisted.

Q: Was there a lot of rationing at that time?

JB: No. There wasn't. It was going to start though.

Q: Did you participate in any kind of scrap drives or anything when you were in school for scrap metal or paper or anything?

JB: No.

Q: Upon graduation from high school, you went into...

JB: I didn't graduate but they gave me my diploma. My father went up and got my diploma. I was in the service. My senior year, I went into the service.

Q: You went into the Air Force. What made you pick the Air Force?

JB: I don't know. It was the Army Air Corps then. I don't know. I just liked the Army Air Corps that's all. I wanted to fly.

Q: Had you ever flown before?

JB: No.

Q: Where did they send you for your basic training?

JB: Basic training, Miami Beach, Florida.

Q: Was that your first time away from home?

JB: Yes.

Q: What was that like for you?

JB: I don't know but it was an experience.

Q: Was there anyone down there from your school?

JB: No.

Q: So, you were all by yourself.

JB: Down there a month.

Q: How long was that basic training?

JB: One month.

Q: Did you stay in a hotel?

JB: Yes. Flamingo Hotel.

Q: What did you think of the training? Was it adequate?

JB: Well, you know being a kid, it's hard to say. Yes. It was alright.

Q: Once you graduated from basic training, whereabouts did they send you? Where did you go after basic training?

JB: I went to Amarillo, Texas for mechanics school. Six months.

Q: Did you find that difficult?

JB: No. Not really. Well it was difficult because I was away from home.

Q: What kind of aircraft did you work on?

JB: B-17's.

Q: B-17s. Anything else?

JB: No. Just B-17's. Flying Fortress.

Q: Did you receive any specialized training. Was it engines or general aircraft?

JB: General.

Q: Did you get to go up in the B-17?

JB: Oh yes. Not there I didn't, in Las Vegas. I went to gunnery school.

Q: What did you do on your time off down in Texas?

JB: I didn't have much time off.

Q: No?

JB: No. Seven days a week. Six days. I think on seven days. I forget. When we were on nights, it was six nights and on days, it was seven days. We went from nights to days and from days to nights.

Q: Were there classes going on continually twenty four hours a day?

JB: No. I don't remember that?

Q: How was the food down there?

JB: Good as far as I can remember.

Q: What kind of quarters did you have? Were you in barracks?

JB: Yes. Barracks. Double deck.

Q: You said the school was about six months long?

JB: Yes. Mechanics school. About six months.

Q: When you graduated from mechanics school...?

JB: They shipped us right to (unclear) air force gunners. They shipped me and about three hundred of us to Las Vegas gunnery school.

Q: Did you get any kind of mechanic's wings when you graduated from mechanic's school?

JB: No, they didn't give you wings for mechanics. They gave you wings for flying.

Q: So, you went to gunnery school?

JB: Gunnery school. Yes. In Las Vegas. I got my wings and Sergeant's stripes.

Q: While you were in mechanic's school, were you promoted to Corporal?

JB: No. We were all Privates.

Q: You were all Privates. What was the gunnery school like?

JB: Well, it was some fun but it was tough flying over the mountains at targets. Shoot at targets.

Q: You flew on B-17's?

JB: Not there, no. AT-6's.

Q: AT-6's. So you flew in the back seat?

JB: Oh yes. 50 caliber machine guns.

Q: Did they give you training on maintaining that 50 caliber. I've heard stories about blindfolding the students.

JB: Yes. They sure did. You had to strip them and put them back together again. All that, you know.

Q: Did you train on any other kind of weapons there?

JB: No.

Q: You didn't receive any type of rifle training there?

JB: When I went to gunnery school, yes. When I went to gunnery school, we trained with 50 caliber machine guns.

Q: I had heard that some of the students, they taught them skeet shooting too just so they would be able to follow a target.

JB: Oh yes. They had a target on a railroad tracks quite far off. It would go by and you would fire at a target on.

Q: Did you fire at any what they called towed targets in the air?

JB: Yes. Fly underneath. You had to fire at them. I shot the target down once.

Q: Did you?

JB: Yes.

Q: When did you graduate from that school approximately?

JB: Last part of June because in July they shipped us overseas. No, I'm sorry, July, they shipped us to Goldsboro, North Carolina and took two weeks' worth of training. Infantry training.

Q: Tell us about that. I never heard of them doing that before. They gave you some infantry training.

JB: Two weeks. All the pilots, copilots, bombardiers and navigators, they were all upset because we were all together enlisted and officers, all together. The thing that got me excited more than anything else, excited got me mad, is that they gave us pup tents to sleep in. For two days, we had to go out in the field and sleep in pup tents. They put two in a pup tent. They have us a rope. I said to one of the guys who was in charge of the corporals, "What the hell is this rope for?" He said, "You'll find out what's it's for. Just put it right around the tent." I never heard of it. Finally told me, "You'll want to put it around the tent because rattlesnakes are here. They won't go over the rope."

Q: Really?

JB: That's why we had to put the rope.

Q: Did you think that training was in case you guys got shot down?

JB: Oh yes. Infantry training.

Q: Were you assigned to a crew right away?

JB: I was never assigned to a crew.

Q: You went through the infantry training for two weeks.

JB: Yes. Then they shipped us to New Jersey.

Q: Fort Dix was it?

JB: (unclear) place. I can't think of the name of it.

Q: Was that Monmouth?

JB: No. I can't think of the name. It's in New Jersey. We were there about three or four days, then head overseas.

Q: You didn't get any leave time to go home or anything?

JB: No

Q: But you were a Sergeant at that point.

JB: Yes. When we graduated from Las Vegas gunnery school, we all made Sergeants.

Q: Did you get your gunnery wings?

JB: Yes. Right there. The same day. Everything the same day.

Q: How did you go overseas?

JB: In a freighter.

Q: In a freighter?

JB: Twenty three days it took us to get over there.

Q: Did you go in a...so, you zig zagged. Did you go in a convoy?

JB: A convoy. There had to be three, four hundred boats. There were a lot of them.

Q: Did you get seasick at all?

JB: No. I never got seasick or airsick.

Q: What was the food like on the boat?

JB: It was alright. It was alright as far as I can remember. Not bad. There was only a bunch of us on a freighter.

Q: Whereabouts did you land?

JB: Barry, Wales. We were there about a day and half and they sent most of us, not most of us, they split us all up. They sent be and eight other guys to Alconbury.

Q: Was this in England?

JB: Oh yes. From Barry, Wales to England to form a squadron. The commanding officer of the group at Alconbury, he called us in, eight of us, and said "Fellas, we're short of mechanics. We're going to start another squadron. The first squadron in the group" He said, "There's eight of you that have mechanic's training. Will you accept being mechanics instead of flying? We'll give you flying pay but you've got to fly four hours a month." We accepted. Eight of us, we accepted. I wound up being the supply chief from Corporal to Sergeant to Tech Sergeant to Line Chief.

Q: I know you were part of the 8th Air Force but do you recall what the unit was? What bomb group?

JB: 1st Air Division.

Q: You were a mechanic. How many aircraft did you have to take care of?

JB: Just one but I had four mechanics. You can see it right there (points to a picture on the wall)

Q: That one aircraft...

JB: (unclear). There were nineteen in a group in a squadron.

Q: And every mechanic had his own airplane?

JB: No. I had four mechanics under me.

Q: You had four mechanics under you.

JB: Yes.

Q: Did your units lose many aircraft?

JB: Oh jeez. I guess so. The Schweinfurt raid. I guess so.

Q: As a mechanic, what kind of problems did you encounter with the returning aircraft?

JB: Flak attack on a ship. Holes in the ship. We had to take one guy out of the ball turret that got shot.

Q: So, you did a lot of sheet metal work?

JB: No, just mechanical work. Sheet metal work they left that to the first echelon did that in the hanger.

Q: But they had sheet metal workers there.

JB: Yes but we didn't do that.

Q: Were you guys kept pretty busy?

JB: Yes.

Q: What did you think of the engines on those aircraft? Did you have many problems with them? They were Pratt and Whitney?

JB: Studebaker.

Q: Studebaker made engines. I didn't know that.

JB: Studebaker. There was another engine too. Pratt and Whitney.

Q: Were there Wright engines also? Wright Cyclones?

JB: I don't think we had them. Mostly Pratt and Whitney, Studebaker and there's another one. I can't think of it now.

Q: Did you get to fly on many missions?

JB: No. I flew a lot though.

Q: Maintenance test flight?

JB: Yes. A lot. I had about thirteen hundred hours flying time.

Q: Did you really, that's a lot of time.

JB: That's a lot of time. Yes.

Q: Did you even encounter the enemy?

JB: No.

Q: What were your living condition like? Did you move around or stay at that one base?

JB: No, I stayed at one. No from Alconbury, we went to Podington. That was our permanent base. I stayed right there until the end of the war.

Q: How long were you there for? About two years?

JB: No. Not quite two years. A year and a half anyway.

Q: What was your daily life like, your daily routine?

JB: Get out to the line. Fix the plane, whatever.

Q: About what time in the morning did you start?

JB: We used to get up about six o'clock, had breakfast, head to the line. The planes were, you know, do what we had to do on the plane. You had to get the planes ready for the flight. If you had a raid – which we had plenty of – you'd get up five o'clock in the morning and get out to the line, preflight the engines and all that for the crews to come out, flight crews.

Q: Then, when you heard that the planes were coming back, did everybody gather?

JB: We stayed right out. We had tents out in the field on a hard stand. We had tents. We would stay in the tents. The only time we'd leave the tent is when we'd go to dinner. We knew they'd be gone a long time. The flights would take seven, eight hours. Most of the time, we'd stay right there.

Q: What about the weather. What was the weather like there?

JB: Sometimes real bad. Winters were kind of tough.

Q: Were they?

JB: Well, being on an island in the ocean you know.

Q: What about time off? Did you get to go into London?

JB: Oh yes. We had leaves. Three day leaves. I took a furlough one time and went to Edinburgh, Scotland with a friend of mine. We did alright considering everything.

Q: Did you get to see any USO shows at all?

JB: Yes. Jimmy Cagney came on the base. Billy Conn, remember him? He was a boxer. He was there and put on a show.

Q: Did you actually get to meet or talk to any of them?

JB: No.

Q: What did Jimmy Cagney do?

JB: He served beer in our officer's club

Q: Did they let you guys go into the officer's club?

JB: No. We had our own non-com, non-commissioned officer's club. No, you couldn't go in the officer's club.

Q: What was the food like over there?

JB: It was alright.

Q: What about interactions with the civilians?

JB: We got along pretty good.

Q: Did you try any of their beer in the pubs?

JB: I guess we did.

Q: I heard they like warm beer over there.

JB: It's all it is. Big spigots and women were bartenders and big spigots.

Q: Did you have a lot of guys in your unit marrying English women?

JB: My 1st Sergeant married one then I don't know what the hell happened. His wife got tangled up with a Negro, I guess. I don't know. He got a leave and went home. He was from Louisiana, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Sergeant Barcelona. I will never forget him. He wouldn't talk to us or anything. He got a hell of a setback. They transferred him back to the states. Barcelona.

Q: What were your officer's like?

JB: They were good. Air Force. You couldn't beat the Air Force. The officers were good. Sometimes go to town, you'd go with the officers. We used to mingle.

Q: Did you basically have like a regular like ten hour work day or twelve hours?

JB: There was no time limit. It all depends on how your plane came in.

Q: On the average, did your planes come back with a lot of damage?

JB: Sometimes. One time my plane came back with a hole about this big (gestures showing a big hole). A shell went right through the bomb bay exploded when it came out. Had guys wounded.

Q: What was it like when you heard about...well, first let me ask you do you recall what it was like when you heard about the death of President Roosevelt?

JB: We were all shocked.

Q: He was probably the only president you had really known.

JB: Yes. We were all shocked.

Q: What about when Germany surrendered?

JB: We had a big celebration but we couldn't leave the field. Our CO, Colonel Wilson had tripled the guard all around the field so we wouldn't go out and wouldn't go to town and raise hell you know.

Q: Was there any talk about being sent to the Pacific at all?

JB: No.

Q: No?

JB: I don't know if anybody volunteered. I think some of them volunteered. I don't remember that. We couldn't wait to get home.

Q: Once the war ended, did the unit continue to fly any missions? Training missions.

JB: No. No. When the war was over, they took all of us in a plane and flew us all around Germany to show us the bombing and all of that. When we got back, our commanding officer volunteered for what they called a Green Project. We went to Istres, France. My group. My commanding officer volunteered our group to fly men from Casablanca to Istres to Azores and back to the United States. He volunteered with what he called a Green Project.

Q: How long were you involved with that for?

JB: Oh, not long. I had a lot of points so I left them in France.

Q: When did you leave to go back home?

JB: Well, let’s see. I got home October 28th, 29th.

Q: Of ’45?

JB: Yes.

Q: How did you get home? Fly?

JB: Nobody would fly. All pilots, copilots, bombardier, nobody would fly. Nobody wanted to fly. They all went back on the boat. We were all drunk (unclear)

Q: Whereabouts did you land?

JB: New Jersey. No. Boston Harbor. Camp Kilmer. The commanding officer welcomed us back. If course, when we came back, they were firing water in the air and all of that celebration. It was a celebration that we were coming back home. I remember that. When we go to the base, Camp Kilmer, I can’t think of that name, Camp Kilmer.

Q: Is that were they discharged you from?

JB: That’s where I left from and where got discharged. Did I get discharged from Fort Dix? I forgot. I went over from Camp Kilmer....I forgot.

Q: That’s alright.

JB: When we came back, the commanding officer of the base he greeted us all back. He said I’ve got a surprise for all of you. You can have a steak supper and ice cream. We got that overseas anyway. The Air Force got the best food anyway.

Q: Once you were discharged, how did you get home? Did you take the train?

JB: I took the train home. Yes, from New Jersey.

Q: What was it like when you got home? Was there a lot of celebration?

JB: I got home at six o’clock in the morning. I got into Albany. I forget what time it was. Five o’clock or something like that. I wanted to get a train up to Mechanicville. The trains were running. The train to Mechanicsville was at eight o’clock. I wasn’t going to wait until eight o’clock. I called a cab. The cab took me to my house, my parent’s house. I’ll never forget. Twelve dollars. I’ll never forget. Now, probably a hundred dollars.

Q: What was it like when your parents saw you?

JB: It was six o’clock in the morning. They weren’t up yet. My mother was up. She hollered to my father, “Jimmy’s home! Jimmy’s home!” I’ll never forget my father. One of my brothers used to write “When you come home, be careful we have a police dog. He’s kind of mean. He bites.” He wasn’t a big I never thought about it. I got out of the taxi that dog came over and started licking my hand. It’s as if he knew me all of his life.

Q: Did you have any other relatives in the service, any brothers?

JB: Yes. My brother Al.

Q: What was he in?

JB: The infantry. He got drafted in the infantry. He got wounded badly in the Battle of the Bulge.

Q: Did he make it home alright?

JB: Yes. He made it home. He was crippled. I think it was his right leg. He just died here about two, three years ago. He was in the Battle of the Bulge. I saw him. They brought him back to England. The funny part about him. When they brought him to the field hospital. One of the fellas, he’s still here.

There were five guys in the field hospital. Five of them. They were all from Mechanicville. This one guy heard Aly Bochetti, his name was Allie was my brother, Aly Bochetti, I just brought him in. I tell you who the guys were. Joe Lorenzo, Paul Connors, John Diminico, I don’t know the other two guys. They all rushed over and he was pretty well....shot through the head. The doc says push him aside, he’s not going to make it. One of the guys said, “Oh no, he’s going to make it. We’ll take care of him.” And he did. He took care of him. He got a hold of me. The Red Cross got a hold of me.

Q: So you got to see your brother?

JB: Yes. Right in England. My pilot flew me down there – down to Manchester – flew me down there. I went to see him. Eddie Vega a neighbor of mine. He comes to see me once and a while. I knew he was stationed there in supply. I went over there and got him said, “Eddie c’mon, Aly got shot up.” He said, “Oh. OK” So we went to the hospital. Allie was crippled. He couldn’t move. He cursed. “Aly, Aly, take it easy!”

He was calling the doctors name. Of course, he was out of it. He got shot through the head but he made it. He got home. I’ll never forget that.

Q: Now when you got home...well, let me ask you. Japan surrendered in August of ’45. Were you still over in Europe at that point?

JB: Yes. I didn’t get home until October.

Q: Was there a lot of celebration when you knew the war was totally over?

JB: Oh yes! Surely! Everybody got drunk. Naturally.

Q: When you got back home, did you join what they called the 52-20 club? It was like an unemployment...

JB: I think I went right to work. I was home about two, three weeks and went right to work.

Q: Where did you go to work?

JB: Different places. The Knit Mill. I worked there for a while. Then, I worked at (unclear) in Troy. Then I quit that and went to work at the (unclear) Mill. I worked there for twenty five years.

Q: Until you retired?

JB: No. I retired from Knolls Atomic.

Q: Oh, you retired from Knowles. What did you do at Knolls?

JB: NDT, Non-destructive testing. I was a, you take x-rays. What do you call them?

Q: OK

JB: I can't think of it now.

Q: You took x-rays of...?

JB: Joints.

Q: Oh OK. Did you do any welding at all?

JB: No. I worked with welders. I inspected their welds.

Q: Just to make sure there wasn't any cracks.

JB: Yes. Indications like that.

Q: I see.

JB: I worked down at Knolls for ten years in Niskayuna then they transferred me up to West Milton. Five years. Ten years. One then the other. Then I went to West Milton and retired from there.

Q: What year did you retire?

JB: 1986.

Q: 1986. Did you go to college at all?

JB: No.

Q: No. Did you make use of the GI Bill?

JB: No.

Q: You didn't buy a home or anything?

JB: No.

Q: Alright. Did you join any veteran's organizations?

JB: The Legion. I belong to the Legion. There's a...see it on the wall there?

Q: Yes. Actually, if you don't mind, when we get toward the end of the interview, I would like to take those pictures down and you can hold them and talk about them. Did you join the VFW too?

JB: No. I did but then I quite the VFW. I belonged to the Elks, fifty nine, I just got my card, fifty nine years. I belonged to the Legion.

Q: Did you stay in contact with any of the guys you were in the service with?

JB: Yes. My pilot. I don't know what happened to him. I haven't heard from him in two years. I don't know if he passed away or what. I don't know. Ross Davidson, the tallest guy in the picture there.

Q: Did you attend any reunions at all?

JB: No.

Q: No? Do you belong to the 8th Air Force Association?

JB: Yes. I did. I get a magazine every month. Not every month. Every two or three months.

Q: Let me stop this for a minute and get those photos. That's your crew.

JB: That's my flying crew. This is my ground crew.

Q: Can you hold that up. What's the name of that plane?

JB: Old Shillelagh.

Q: It says Buzz Buggy I think.

JB: Yes but this wasn't my ship. I think (unclear)

Q: Can you name crew?

JB: That's Johnny Rutherford, he was the copilot. Carter (unclear), he was the navigator. Ross Davidson, he was the pilot. I don't know his first name, (Wilson Mayer), he was the bombardier.

Q: And the...

JB: Ground crew. Of course, I was the crew chief and these were my four mechanics.

Q: Do you know if any of those fellas are still living?

JB: I couldn't tell you.

Q: How do you think your time in the service changed or affected your life?

JB: Well, it made you appreciate America more than anything else. Appreciate your family.

Q: Did you ever get a chance to go back overseas at all?

JB: I could have gone but once I got home that was it. I stayed put.

Q: Is there anything that you want to touch on that we missed, funny or not so funny?

JB: No.

Q: Thank you so much for your interview.