

**James F. Casey  
Veteran**

**Mike Russert  
Wayne Clarke  
New York State Military Museum  
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on  
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**Q:** This an interview with James Casey, at the Hampton Inn in Commack, New York, February 27, 2003 at approximately 9 A.M. Interviewers are Mike Russert and Wayne Clark. Could you give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth please?

**JC:** James F. Casey, I was born May 13, 1924 in Brooklyn.

**Q:** Okay, what was your pre-war educational background?

**JC:** I was in high school in my last term when the war started.

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

**JC:** The day that Pearl Harbor happened I was ushered down into the theatre... in downtown Brooklyn. It was sometime that afternoon when we were told we had to get all of the service men out of the theatre.

**Q:** What was your reaction when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

**JC:** Well, I knew something bad. That's what we knew, because the next morning in high school they brought us all into the auditorium and we listened to President Roosevelt. It was at that time that we started to get the impact of the war. Then, what happened after that was my cousin who was two years older than me was already hooked up with the army base in Brooklyn. We had a big army base in Brooklyn... as a civilian employee. He came and spoke to my mother that January. I left school, went down to the army base and they trained me plant in the Ford plant in Pennsylvania. What I was doing then was shipping over the tanks and trucks and sealing them on the ships to get them into Africa. We were doing it so fast; we were even putting phony cannons on the M-3 tanks at that time. I did that, and I was eighteen then. I was called, and of course, I was the oldest of four kids. My mother was a widow. She tried to get me out, and I went in and talked to the [unclear] and I went.

**Q:** You selected the Air Force?

**JC:** No! Funny thing, they took us one morning from a street corner in Brooklyn and went over to Penn Station. They put us on a train, and we didn't know where

we were going. About eight or nine hours later we ended wound up in Camp Upton. Out in the Yaphank, New York. I was never out here, you know, so we didn't know where we were. It took all day to get there. During the testing period, I met two fellas'... older guys, one had done one year of service. He was like a little father to me.

**Q:** Define older!

**JC:** Then after the testing they called out certain names and said we qualified for the Air Force if we wanted to take it. I was going to turn it down, I figured I'd do what I did for the army base. This guy, he said, "You don't want that." I went into the Air Force.

**Q:** Where did you go for your basic training?

**JC:** I went to Miami.

**Q:** Oh!

**JC:** Not bad. Because I was never outside of New York State, at that time. I went down there, and they put me in Harlingen, Texas for air gunnery school. Coming from Brooklyn as a kid, and next thing I knew I was flying over the Gulf of Mexico... shooting and a big sleeve flowing. From there, I went up to Boise, Idaho. We met up with nine other guys and they made a crew. From there, we picked up a plane in Kansas City. We flew to New Hampshire, Labrador, and North Ireland.

**Q:** Now, was your crew together for the whole war? Or your whole-

**JC:** No. What had happened was, when we got over there, the B-24's, of course, were being used for longer distances, and they carried more than B-17's. We had the turret, the belly turret, and that was slowing us down and dragged. So, we took them out. So, now we had an opportunity to get rid of the belly gunner, or to stay as a crew; and we elected to stay as a crew. We rotated and one guy stayed on the ground. That's how we stayed up until the 25<sup>th</sup> mission. We were required at that time to do 25 missions. After that, we were asked to stay five more. I stayed for ten. I did thirty-five missions then came back. I was back here before the war ended.

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

**JC:** No. On the way over, we lost a few planes flying over the North Atlantic. We had a big problem with ours. What they used to do was bring the continental engineers up to New Hampshire, at that time, because they were trying to get their kicks out of these new planes, you know? We had a great guy, an engineer, by the name of Bob Swank. When we had trouble, now we had developed trouble on the way over.

Of course, we were looking out to try to get to Iceland, at that point. I forget how many planes there were. But we were now all alone. He saved the day, whatever he did. He was a farm guy, a little older than us. Let's say we made North Ireland anyway, and there was a gas problem. What they did was... they used to call me Irish [laughs]. What they did was flew us up the West Coast of Ireland. We were very low at that point, and so, I could see Ireland. We landed and the plane stayed there. They took us by boat then to Scotland.

**Q:** On your missions did you use the same plane?

**JC:** We started out using the same plane, they gave us another plane when we got there. Of course, the invasion had started. They gave us a plane and we started out with that one. They kept changing. The one that was shot up, that was left in North France. I forget what plane kind of plane we came back in. Anyways, that was there, and we lost another one in Belgium. Then, we stayed pretty much with the same plane.

**Q:** Did you ever get to name your plane?

**JC:** The first one going over we did.

**Q:** What did you name it?

**JC:** Little Audrey.

**Q:** How did that come about?

**JC:** That was the pilot's girlfriend. He never married her, so that's that.

**Q:** Any nose art, or just the name?

**JC:** Well, it was eventually shut down, that we found out. When they brought it over from North Ireland. I think the 396, I'm not sure of that, it was shot down.

**Q:** Did you ever decorate your jacket?

**JC:** Yes. In fact, the time when we got into North France and Nancy, all the gunners used to have... I had "Big Irish" on my left, and a big shamrock and we had bombs for each trip. The ground troops were laughing at us.

**Q:** Did you keep your jacket?

**JC:** I kept it after the war, but I certainly wouldn't fit in it now. I forgot what... I think where, I guess. I never wore it when I came back because I'd be walking around with bombs all over it.

**Q:** Could you describe some of your missions? Where were you based in England?

**JC:** In Shipdham, it's near Durham. It's off the North Sea. We were out in a farm area. We had Nissen huts and with potbelly stoves and that's where we were.

**Q:** Did you have any contact with the civilian population?

**JC:** Well actually, it was a working farm. They were all over the place. The Nissan huts were somewhat near it and we had bomb shelters built around it because this was the path of those Veto bombs coming over.

**Q:** How were your relations with the people then?

**JC:** We used to go to a small town, you know, the pubs. They used to kick us out at ten o'clock at night and that was it. We used to go in by bike and come back.

**Q:** Could you describe some of your missions? Where were most of your bases?

**JC:** The first mission we went to at that time, the thing was to stop the supplies coming into France for the invasion.

**Q:** When was your first mission?

**JC:** It was after the invasion started. I think it was the last part of June in 44'. We went to Koblenz, Germany. The reason we remember that. After we went through, the flack was so thick we were just glad it was over. But we didn't drop the bombs. Something was wrong on the lead plane and they said we had to go back.

**Q:** Did your plane have a bomb site in it? Or did you go off the lead plane?

**JC:** Yes. No, we had a bomb there. But most of the time, all planes were watching the lead.

**Q:** Did you rotate on the plane as to which gun you were-

**JC:** I was a waist gunner when I started out. We had a tail gunner and he got notified there that his brother had been killed and shot down from another group. He had a little bit of a problem and he could not get back in the tail. So, of course, they were going to ground him and kind of talked him into it, and I volunteered to go in the back and stay to keep him so he did his missions.

**Q:** Could you tell us about some of your missions then?

**JC:** The one in Cope Lents we kind of got hit with some of the flak on the second run going in. There were a few other missions that were tough. But then we went to St. Lowe, where Lieutenant General Ulysses McNeill was killed; that was a major accident. Then when we got hit, I know we landed and made it to Nancy, France.

**Q:** What was that mission? Which number was that?

**JC:** I don't know. I'm guessing ninth or tenth, somewhere around that. A couple after that we went down outside Brussels and we go to the British there. They were still fighting in the city of Brussels. The British took us in, and we had tea in the afternoon.

**Q:** Did you bail out both times? Or did you-

**JC:** No, no. We went down with the plane. The pilot gave us the opportunity to bail out, and we stuck with him, because he was taking it down. What we did there, we threw out a lot of weight over where we were, and he got us to what we thought was behind the lines. Sure enough, it was. Then, we got back from there and we continued on. The pilot, the co-pilot, the navigator and the radio operator and engineer completed the twenty-five ahead of us because we were rotating some of them. I didn't rotate all the time, but the rest of them. They had twenty-five in and they were sent home and we stayed and continued on. Not all of them completed, after that, but then when we went from different crew-to-crew. That wasn't nice, but we did it.

**Q:** Were you ever under attack by fighters?

**JC:** Yup.

**Q:** Do you know if you ever had any hits?

**JC:** I don't know. We aimed, we saw planes go down, but without cameras and whatever. One of the worst of the things was when one of the Battles of the Bulges was on, and we were called to go in on low level. We were the height of treetops and dropped stuff to the parachutes there. That was rough because it was one of the worst winters in Europe at the time because of the snow. Another time in France, we were low level and we could hardly see. So, I was in the waist on both watching. I kept screaming at one point because the tip of the wing was right near a church steeple. All in all, we're lucky to be here. No one ever told us that the per-capita... that the Air Force lost more people than any other outfit in World War II.

**Q:** I know one of the veterans yesterday told us all these statistics on it.

**JC:** Yes, we were learning that later.

**Q:** Yes. Did you ever see any U.S.O. shows while you were there?

**JC:** No. I saw Eleanor Roosevelt once. Who else? No, I never saw any of them.

**Q:** When was your last mission?

**JC:** It was in April of 45'. Then they took us down to Sea Port and they put us on a ship. We came in a convoy back to New York. It took us like nine or ten days to get back. I was here maybe a couple weeks after the war ended.

**Q:** What did you do between April and September when you were discharged?

**JC:** I was sent to a convalescent hospital in Colorado. Had a little problem with my speech. They told me it was a trauma. Then, I got discharged from the hospital.

**Q:** Did you ever suffer from any frostbite at all?

**JC:** I did. I was in the tail one day when a shot hit and the heater went out. I had very bad frostbite in the back.

**Q:** What was your reaction and where were you when you heard about the death of President Roosevelt?

**JC:** I'll tell you. We were all lined up on a boat. We were notified there, we heard it over the loudspeaker.

**Q:** This is when you were going home?

**JC:** We were just getting on a boat to come back. Guys were crying. It was very sad.

**Q:** What was your reaction when you heard about the atomic bombs being dropped?

**JC:** We were out in Colorado at the time. We thought it was great [laughs] because we thought we were going over to Japan. We never knew how many people were killed at the time. As all we knew, it ended the war.

**Q:** Did you ever make use of the G.I. Bill?

**JC:** For education. I think for about six months I went to a school. What was nice when I took that discharge back to high school, they gave me my diploma. I only had six months to go.

**Q:** Did you ever use the fifty-two twenty club?

**JC:** No.

**Q:** Did you join any or do you belong to any veteran's organizations?

**JC:** Yup. I belong to the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Disabled American Veterans. That's about it.

**Q:** You don't belong to Youth Air Force?

**JC:** Oh, I do! That's right, I do; and the forty-fourth bomb group. I went to one reunion. Most of our guys are gone. It's only myself and the engineer that I know is alive.

**Q:** Did you ever keep in contact with any of them?

**JC:** I did. I kept in contact with quite a few of them but that was years ago and they're all dying. There's only about three of us left. But I had a very great reunion. We went to the museum. We met there and it was nice. Initially, when I went up to Idaho the general was Leon Johnson, Congressional Medal of Honor from the forty-fourth bomb group that went into Palestine. One of the guys when I got the forty-fourth had worked for him. We had a great guy. The forty-fourth was a great group. It went on to become a strategic bomber and still is active.

**Q:** How do you think your military service affected your life? Do you think it affected it in any way?

**JC:** Well, it got me out of Brooklyn. The first trip, anyway. It certainly made me grow up quick, that's for sure. I thought we did a good job. If I had to do it again, I would. No problem with that.

**Q:** Okay. You brought some things in.

**JC:** Yes.

**Q:** If you could hold it up to the camera Wayne can focus on that. When were they taken?

**JC:** This was taken when I was in Harlingen, Texas. It's when we flew the open cockpit flying and shooting. This is me getting the first air medal from Colonel Lindhowsen.

**Q:** Okay.

**JC:** This is the crew. I think this was taken before we left Idaho.

**Q:** Whereabouts are you?

**JC:** See that guy in the middle there, the kid? I was the youngest.

**Q:** Standing?

**JC:** I'm down there in the- [Pointing to picture]

**Q:** Alright.

**JC:** This here is a v-mail that took six weeks to get back. If you notice, there's a block-out. They blocked out the fact that we flew over. That was confidential. I don't know how they thought we got over there. Most guys went by boat, I guess.

**Q:** Alright.

**JC:** Funny story with this, I just sent this copy over to a marine. My wife's nephew. This took six weeks, and he faxed this back in twenty minutes! How about that? This is the first citation for an air medal. There are so many bomb things.

**Q:** Did you take these?

**JC:** Yes. We had a camera in the waist of the plane. This just shows a flight as we're going over. You probably couldn't see these. This is what you call- when we used to come back, they used to interrogate us, debrief us. These were the shots on the target. These show the shot of the bombs leaving.

**Q:** What was it like as a tail gunner? Was that worse than being a waist gunner?

**JC:** Just that you're cramped. The waist was very cold, by the way, because you had no glass. It was open at that time, it was wide open, or little did anybody realize. One day I hear them talking how cold it was, it was seventy-three below

zero. I said woah! Of course, we had the oxygen on all the time. We used to get back and they used to give us a shot of whiskey when we had to head into the debriefing. You'd almost fall over when you took that, we were nineteen years old.

**Q:** Were you sealed into the tail?

**JC:** That's it, because you're in a turret. See, the 17 was different. Here you had to get into a turret. That was confining, and you can't move. When the flak was coming, or the, you know-

**Q:** What kind of parachute did you carry? The chest pack?

**JC:** Chest. You couldn't put it on back there. You had to keep it close.

**Q:** Did you wear your flak jacket?

**JC:** I used to sit on it back there. That was... cozy. These things were- forget it.

**Q:** Most of the guys said they sat on them!

**JC:** Yes!

[All laugh]

**JC:** These are guys I even forget, but here's a picture when we got over there and you [can] see them taking out the wall turret. You can imagine that was low hydraulically.

**Q:** Did you ever go into the wall turret?

**JC:** I was in it, but I didn't fly in it. That was a confining thing. You were actually wrapped around. That was a toughie, that one.

**Q:** Now what is this?

**JC:** This was the German Junker that's out in the museum we have in Dayton. That's the reunion. This is our reunion out in Dayton. Yes. This is what was left there that day.

**JC:** Here we had on display the complete name of the B-24-

**Q:** Cockpit?

**JC:** Cockpit. The whole thing, compared to what you see today.

**Q:** Okay! Well, thank you very much.

**JC:** We had a guy from Mississippi on our crew who used to go out and shoot rabbits. Because we weren't having roast beef and cabbage over there. So, he used to cook the rabbits. One day, I went and I found a stray cow. I put [her] into the bomb shelter while we went flying. I didn't know meat from Brooklyn; I never saw that a cow had to be milked. The cow was in there a couple days screaming and hollering. The farmers came in looking for the cow. Of course, they [had] heard [it]. There was a big investigation, you know. How did the cow get down there? Years later, when I was down in Dayton I admitted to my crime and we had a big laugh.



**Q:** They didn't give you an Article 15?

**JC:** They didn't. We all laughed at that, but the farmer got his cow back. I thought he would cut it up, or whatever. But that's a little human.