

**Franklyn Topliff
Narrator**

**Herkimer County Veteran's Video Project
Interviewers (INT)**

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**Interviewers: INT
Franklyn Topliff: FT**

Ok my name is Franklyn Topliff. I'm from Gloversville, New York. And we're talking about the draft of the army of World War 2. Now I was graduating from high school in 39'. I had small jobs around town until I went to Plattsburgh for... what they call a defense school and that school, I forget how many weeks it was for but they gave us a job down in Baltimore, Maryland which was Glen L. Martin, and Glen L Martin made the B-26, but after I left Glen L. Martin I went to Bell aircraft and that was in Buffalo New York now from there I got my draft.

After going from the defense school in Plattsburgh, I went to Glen L Martin and that was in Baltimore Maryland. That was where they were building the B-26's, which was a medium bomber. I stayed in for a while of course I was there when Pearl Harbor came. So we were all how do I say, had to register for the draft at that time. I got one deferment there, then I went to Buffalo. Bell aircraft. (Unclear) Bell aircraft made a pursuit bomber, P-59 I think, I can't quite remember what it was. Anyway from there I got my draft papers from Gloversville, which was a roundabout way.

So I left December something, 1942. With the (unclear) air force we went to I'd say I think had to go to Utica then we went down New York, I went to Camp Upton, from there I went to Atlantic city after I had my basic training. From there I went down to mechanical school, airplane mechanics, in North Carolina. I think that was Seymour Johnson fields if I'm not mistaken, and from there I went down to Fort Myers for Gunnery school. And then after that of course we were transferred over to Europe, I think that was in March of 44' if I'm not mistaken.

The ship we took was an Italian ship, the name of it I couldn't tell you. But it took us two weeks to go from New York to Scotland. That's going up and down and away from the soviets (unclear) and everything. But then we landed in Scotland. There was Scotsman out there with their kilts and bagpipes and we took a train down to England, I couldn't tell you just where it was in England we went but, we were in England until the battle of

D-day. And from D-day after I say that week (unclear) we all went across into France. We stayed there for quite a while then from France we went on to Holland, Belgium, and Germany, that's where our headquarters were.

Well during the brief time in England, the scary part I had there. They had what they're called buzz bombs, now these buzz bombs well you can tell the time of the day every time it went off. But if the thing, the engine or motor cut off, then you got out of the way! According to the Germans at that time we were wiped out but, they never touched us. One day I had this pass to go to this town and we stayed at a Red Cross club building, I don't know who I went with or anything else but I just remember going there.

After the buzz bombs was what they called a v-2 rocket .Well we were sleeping in bunks there and that v-2 rocket exploded and say we're here right down beside the building. It took the walls and ceiling down, my bunk was covered with bricks, and every window in that town was busted. If we were say ten feet closer we would have all been wiped out. God as my witness. Well besides that England was calm until we got over to France. Then it was our job, at that time I was grounded from flying, my nerves gave out and everything so, no more flying. I was on the ground as a mechanic. Of course at the battle of the bulge we couldn't even go to bed without carrying our rifles with us because we never knew what was going to happen. So far, we were lucky, yes I don't know what else I can say.

INT: Let's go back a little bit, this is kind of interesting, defense school in Plattsburgh. Now this is before we were in the war with the British, what kinds of things did they teach you in defense school in Plattsburgh?

FT: Sheet metal.

INT: Sheet metal?

FT: Sheet metal yes.

INT: How to rivet it and that kind of thing or what?

FT: Anything. Layout, everything else, of course that's why when I got done at Glen L. Martin I was also on sheet metal.

INT: Now you were in Baltimore when Pearl Harbor happened?

FT: Yes.

INT: What was that like? I mean...

FT: Well all I remember was that they had spotlights all over the place because you're right near the harbor there. It was just like you see in the movies so it was big flights there circling around, going back and forth.

INT: Trying to spot airplanes?

FT: A spotter yes. (Unclear)

INT: What did you do? I guess you were in Buffalo when you got your draft notice?

FT: Yes.

INT: Then you went to Utica?

FT: No, first I went home.

INT: Ok.

FT: I had to say goodbye to everybody, then, I think. No. My memory is not as good as it should be. I think we went to Utica, then we boarded a train and it took us down to New York.

INT: You mentioned Camp Upton. Now, where was that?

FT: I think that was in Long Island.

INT: Oh, ok. Now that's where basic training was?

FT: No, basic training was Atlantic City.

INT: Ok so..?

FT: We stayed in hotels there.

INT: Well!?

FT: Which is worse than anything else, you've heard the word chicken? That's how that was. One of the nice things about it (unclear) was stationed over there at the time.

INT: Ok.

FT: And we came back from marching around, and we came back to our hotel where we had our mess hall, across the street. So we go across the street and start up the stairs and we heard music. And we get there and it's Glenn Norton (unclear) and his orchestra playing for us.

INT: Wow!

FT: And I saw him a few times and I always say how I was in my hotel playing the piano, he heard me then he ran out.

(Both laugh)

FT: I did see him. He was a very nice person.

INT: You do play the piano? Did you play then too?

FT: Oh yes.

INT: Did that generate a crowd of people around you when did?

FT: Oh, lots of times.

INT: Oh yeah?

FT: For that I played in high school if anyone remembers it or not, we had what we called a swing chapel.

INT: Ok.

FT: That was in 39', there were fifty pieces up on that stage, how they ever got up on that stage I don't know (laughs), long time.

INT: Now after you went to the continent from after D day you said you went to France, and Holland, Belgium and then eventually into Germany.

FT: A part of it yes.

INT: Yeah. Do you recall where you crossed over?

FT: Pardon?

INT: Do you remember where you crossed into Germany?

FT: Not all, let's just say the first part of Germany.

INT: Ok.

FT: We couldn't fraternize at all at that time.

INT: When you were getting ready to leave home were you part of a large family here at home?

FT: No, I only had one sister.

INT: One sister so, your mom wrote to you a lot?

FT: Oh yes, then once in a while I would write back.

INT: When you were on your flying status, you were a gunner?

FT: Mostly, yes.

INT: Tail? Belly?

FT: Tail gunner. I was supposedly what they called an engineer gunner.

INT: Ok so, you kept track of the situation of the aircraft as well as the gunnery duties?

FT: Oh yes.

INT: Yeah. So how do you think this whole thing in retrospect, thinking back at it, effected you personally?

FT: Of course I was like many of us, the first thing we wanted to do was, out of the service (unclear) was to be in the US of A (United States of America) again.

INT: You came back to Gloversville and what did you do after you got out?

FT: Oh, I started working around a little bit, then two other fellas and myself went out to California.

INT: Oh, what did you do out there?

FT: Aircraft.

INT: Aircraft?

FT: Yes, that was aircraft. I went out with Jack Burhoff (unclear) and Walt Cilusky (unclear).

INT: Well you went through this whole thing real quick. Anything, any memory other than a v-2 flying down on you that was terribly traumatic?

FT: Well you're scared a lot of the times. Anything moving you didn't know what it is, you were just hoping to make it to the next day.

INT: You have some pictures there in front of you would you mind sharing those with us please?

FT: Well right here is when I was in France. The real reason for having a pass so, we got on the train. It was wintertime, no heat on the train, we froze I know that. And this one here is the Eiffel tower. This was from a friend of mine, he took the picture. That's the

closest to the Eiffel tower you could get at that time because everything was well, you weren't allowed to be there.

INT: Where were you stationed at that time when you took the train? What was the name of that place?

FT: The town I was in?

INT: Yeah.

FT: Oh I couldn't tell you, it was near, well we called it San Quentin. It's San Quentin. That was about the closest town that I could remember now. And this one here is what I called the arc de triumph but other people called it the French boy (unclear). I guess well I remember it because that's how many years ago? Almost sixty? Yes sixty years ago.

INT: Yeah close to fifty (unclear).

FT: And this here is a picture of the plane that I was in. It's a B-26. I was in what they called the 9th air core, army air core. 397th group 598th squadron.

INT: And the squadrons are the depictions on the corners there?

FT: My squadron was this one here, the 598th. Forgot I went to a reunion just this last year in Tucson, Arizona.

INT: Now up to this point before you went to the reunion you said it had been fifty years before you'd go to the reunion again. Did you keep track of any of the people in your squadron prior to that?

FT: When I went to the first reunion I didn't know a single soul, but I got acquainted with them.

INT: A lot of the same experiences?

FT: Yes. Some of them. Some of them been there for every one of them. It's just like somehow I slipped through the cracks. Well I finally got a card in the mail and it said, Is

it possible you're one of the person's that they couldn't find or otherwise, I always lived in the same place (chuckles).

INT: Are you the Frank Topliff?

FT: (Nods yes and chuckles)

INT: So all said and done what's your final comment on the times you spent?

FT: Well I suppose I learned something you know. The war (unclear) now and the way the rest of the world is but, there's nothing like coming home.

INT: Well thank you so much for coming and sharing with us today.

FT: Well, I'm sorry I couldn't think of a lot of the other stuff you know.

INT: It's alright that's fine, Thank you again.

FT: Ok.