

**James William Elliott
Veteran**

**Wayne Clarke
Interviewer**

**Interviewed on August 10, 2009
Kingston, NY**

WC: Today is the tenth of August two thousand and nine. We are at the American Legion Hall in Margaretville, New York. My name is Wayne Clark and I'm with the New York State military museum.

WC: Sir, for the record would you please state your full name, your date and place of birth.

JE: My name is James William Elliott, place of birth New Kingston and born November twenty-fourth nineteen-twenty-three.

WC: Did you attend school in New Kingston?

JE: Yes, a district school in a one-room schoolhouse. Not a half a mile from our farm. I attended seventh grade and the eighth grade I came to Margaretville Highschool. I think it was two years later in junior year, I went into a new school down there through Beckley by the fire hall.

WC: What year did you graduate from high school?

JE: Nineteen forty-one

WC: You went into the services shortly after?

JE: I went in, and I applied for air cadet, but I didn't quite pass. I didn't go so I stayed and helped my dad on the farm. Until January forty-three. Then I was drafted.

WC: You were drafted into the Army?

JE: Yes, drafted into the army, chemical worker.

WC: Where did you go for your basic training?

JE: That was campsite in Alabama

WC: Was that your first time away from home?

JE: Well, a long period of time away from home. I've been away for a few days, my folks had friends down in Long Island in New York City. In the nineteen thirty-nine world fairs.

WC: Now before you went into the services during WWII, what was it like here in Margaretville? Was there a lot of rationing, shortages of things?

JE: Oh, you mean during war, well they had quite a bit of rationing, tires batteries, gasoline, um rubber products and um quite a few things. Uh meat I, [unclear], meat stamps I'm not sure, Sugar was rationed.

WC: What was it like on the farm, did you have plenty to eat?

JE: Oh yes

WC: Did you have a dairy farm?

JE: A dairy farm, a small dairy farm.

WC: Did you have to hire help or was it just all family runs?

JE: Well, my brother was supposed to be helping but he was driving [unclear], so I did the family helping. Then when my name came up in the draft my dad tried to get me deferred because my brother was away most the time, he wasn't helping on the farm. Uh they said no.

WC: So, what did your father have to do when you were drafted?

JE: Well just about [laugh]... he had to make do with what we had. We didn't have a lot of cows, but it was a lot of hand labor. Not like how we are mechanized like we are today. We only had twenty-seven cows, which is nothing today.

WC: Now after you completed your basic training, where did you go from there?

JE: Well, I stayed at the campsite in Alabama for a while, after basic.

WC: Now did that include the chemical core?

JE: Yeah, that was our job, it was to gas proof uh clothing. We had huge washer machines and dryers ext. We had to gas proof, wash the clothes and pregnant them gas proofing. Like that exposed mustard gas you get burned you know other gases too, yeah that was our duty.

WC: How long did you do that for?

JE: Oh, it must have been in January of forty-three till about July or August when I went to Birmingham Alabama and took the air cadet test, and that time passed it.

WC: Well, let me just go back a little bit, we mentioned Pearl Harbor.

WC: Where were you when the attack took place, do you remember anything about it?

JE: I remember being in the house in the kitchen or living room. The minister happened to show up. I think my mother was listening to the news because it was really news, this was the day that it happened, it just happened. He turned the radio off, and it made her kind of angry. [laughing] He wanted to talk but anyway that's the only thing I really remember. I remember it was a lot of excitement. And uh we were pretty cocky, you know, we thought we were going to show those japs a thing or two. Several years later we did [laugh] but it was a long road back.

WC: Alright so uh you went to a school in Alabama?

JE: Well, it was training, it was company training we all had our pole in the [unclear] and I was one of the selected yard birds, I guess.

WC: For the air cadet?

JE: No, that was for chemical warfare. Then I took the test, and I did a little bad thing there too. I went over my COs head and went to general headquarters and which I got chewed out for after words, [laugh] it was too late then. But I remember the lieutenant Lamont they were sort of chewing me out a little bit. I called in the other room; caption

Wils was the CO of [unclear], and uh lieutenant Lemont after they got all done chewing me out and says I wish I could go.

WC: Where was that school that they sent you to?

JE: Oh, I went [unclear] general headquarters to put me some place, you know to wait until I was called. Then we went to Miami beach where we had to do the test all over again. Some more tests and physicals. At the end of the day, they realized they just had too many pilots, navigators and inbound [unclear] by this time. So, they washed out in this group five thousand cadet. They had to do something with us, you know. So, we had the aptitude test we took. And apparently, I figured mechanics would be the best for me I guess I don't know. But anyway, that's where I ended up going, was Amarillo, Texas to the mechanic's school and to be on the line for the mechanic or maybe a crew chief or headed towards that. Or I could volunteer for a gunnery school and be an engineering gunner.

WC: So that's the road you took?

JE: That's the road I took, I went through the six weeks of a sort of intense of mechanic school. It was sort of a, what do I want to say ...

WC: Sort of a crash course

JE: fast, fast education. So, then after graduating from Amarillo, I volunteered to go to gunnery school. All flying jobs, everything was flying, same with submarines it was volunteer. They couldn't make you fly and if you didn't want to fly, well it was volunteer to being with.

WC: Now what about swisher gunnery school?

JE: That was in Kingman, Arizona

WC: What type of [unclear] did you try?

JE: [unclear] Had a 30-caliber air cooler, then the handheld was fifty calibers, and the plane were all 50 calibers. I had the two top guns in tour and the tail gunner, for all twins were fifties.

WC: What type of aircraft did you train on?

JE: Uh B seventeen. In fact, we didn't do very much flying in gunnery school. First was a uh moving base, moving target it was shotguns. They had shot guns mounted on framework for machine guns. We would head out back on the pickup truck, and we would run around this racetrack. They shoot up pigeons from different areas. We took turns manning the pigeon houses, they were all around the track at different degrees. So, it would teach you to lead on a moving base, moving target. They taught you the correct amount of amount of lead, so one part of the group managed the ski traps, and they were little huts so you couldn't get shot or anything or anything you know. They came out of a shot towards the racetrack. And you will try to hit them with a shot gun or motor [unclear] with the machine gun sites.

WC: Once you completed that school, what happened next?

JE: Then we, we uh got a delay in route and we went home. We had to report to Tampa, Florida. So, I went to Maimi beach, the first one I went into the air core, then when we got washed out, I went to Amarillo and then Kingman and the delay in route home and

then a week at home and then I went to Tampa, Florida. That's where we met a piolet and co-piolet and the rest of the crew, navigator.

WC: And did you all go overseas together?

JE: Uh yes, yeah, we all went overseas. And [unclear] left us, we didn't have a bomb [unclear] listen man drop the bombs, but they would delete they had a lead bomber [unclear] in a group then he was supposed to be the bastard, the good one anyway, highly qualified. He would drop with his load of bombs, there a smoke grenade to marker. When you come up to that marker other airplanes would drop bombs on that marker so.

WC: Now did you go overseas by airplane?

JE: yeah, we took an airplane over.

WC: What route did you take?

JE: A b- seventeen G.

WC: but which way did you go, did you go...

JE: We went the northern route, yeah. And in route we had an engine fire, starting the engines up. We were going to leave in the dark. It doesn't stay light very long up there [laugh]. We were just getting ready to take off at night anyway.

Female Voice: From where, from where?

JE: From Booths Bay, Labrador, well we got an engine fire, and they used the two fire battles to put it out. And believe me it really lit up the rain road. I was starting a number four engine and that's what caught fire, backfired, boy the whole thing was a blaze. So, we pulled the first trail battle and then turned to the second one and used that tool, and then the fire went out. But we didn't leave with the rest of the group, the rest of the group went to Greenland, and I think Iceland and down to presquick. I don't know where they went, we never heard. The next day they got us back in order, so we flew nonstop from Boos Bay to Nuts Corners Ireland, that will be outside of Belfast. So, we made a, that was a long trip, we had an [unclear] tank four hundred gallons.

WC: No once you landed overseas, did you have to turn the airplane in

JE: Yes, that went to the replacement depot.

WC: Then where did they send you guys?

JE: then we went to a...., well it was Charlie, it was a neighborhood town, well a replacement depot.

WC: Now when was that?

JE: That was in February forty-four. No that will be forty-five I'm sorry, because the war was over in April or May of forty-five.

WC: What was your first mission?

JE: My first mission was a milk run, I guess. [unclear], I think a plow in one of those old towns anyway.

WC: Did you get attacked by fighters or hit with flak?

JE: Oh, it was flack most of all, Dave course the Germans had developed the swallows and the ME- two six two the jet. So, we see them attack a formation behind us, and

never attacked us. Apparently maybe because we had, well they had practiced tight formation flying. That's one thing they were really buggy on, to keep formation tight, solid group because otherwise the Germans will dive right through the formation and break them up. And they can get a stray or a straggler. That's the way they told me, uh maybe that's why we weren't attacked, and the B-twenty-four were a lot easier to shoot down, so they concentrated more on those.

WC: Now was your aircraft hit with flak at all?

JE: oh yeah, yeah, my attitude was from when we first had flak it looks horrible [laugh] I changed my mind.

WC: And you were the top tour gunner?

JE: I was the top Tour, yeah

Female Voice: Tell what happened to Laurance.

JE: Oh, you mean when we had a near miss.

Female Voice: Yeah

JE: yeah, it was big, it was over Berlin, I think there were six-hundred flak guns down there anyway and uh this shell I was looking right at it. It was one hundred.... Germans had their good guns it was eighty-eight. But uh I can't remember if they had the one hundred and fifty millimeters, or we had that. I think we had the hundred and fifty-five and I'm not sure. But anyway, the Germans had eaten around one hundred and fifty-five or one hundred and fifty. When the shell went off hook, I was just looking right at it. It just filled my whole vision, there's this great big angry red ball of fire, I mean extensive, about fifteen twenty feet off our left wing, and I was looking right at it. Boy I scooted down, pulled my goggles on, maybe we can get a plex glass or strap on for our eyes. But a relief when we were on the bomb runway, the co-piolet tells the radio operator to drop chaff or time to drop window or window and Rj chaff. We called it chaff for a slang word. Had a little chute in the back on the left-hand side with you slides behind the radio where he was at, he has the swivel seat. He could swing around to the rare and take care of his power supplies because the radio was on the back of the ball pit. Anyway, the co-piolet says time to throw chaff, and he had just turned around and a big piece of flak came through right where he was, just as he turned around it came through there, that's what's you call luck I guess or a Miricale.

WC: How many missions did you end up flying?

JE: I had twenty-two out of thirty.

WC: Than the war ended?

JE: yeah, then the war ended, we ran out of targets. After the fifteenth of April we didn't do much flying.

WC: Was there a lot of celebration?

JE: Yeah, there was quite a bit. Boy I'll tell you if you wanted to watch out, you can't stick your head out the back door of a barracks or something there were forty-fives going off all over the place.

WC: Now what unit were you with?

JE: Ninety forth bomb group

WC: Ok you were with the eight Air Force

JE: Yeah, ninety forth

WC: No did you fly the same airplane?

JE: Pretty much, its uh just like anything else. Like a business, you give the green cruise the most used equipment.

WC: Now did your plane have a name at all?

JE: Well, the first we had was the Ordinance Express and the second one we had was the five eleven, the last three serial numbers and that was uh we didn't have a name for that one.

WC: Did you decorate your flight jacket at all?

JE: No, I lost my brand-new flight jacket at Goose Bay. I lay on the cot, and someone walked through and lifted my jacket right off. So, I got a replacement, an old moth-eaten used one.

WC: Now once the war has ended, did you continue to fly any missions at all or any training missions or anything?

JE: yeah, they had one or two missions of formation flying, to keep things busy. Then we transported, we took one group of personals to casa Blanca on Africa. We didn't know anything about the bomb, the atomic bomb so we figured they were going to go over the eastern route or go over to the middle east and end up in India or over in China, for the attack on Japan. They were looking for a million casualties among the Americans to invade the home islands there. And so, the Taliban save quite a lot of lives really.

WC: Was there a lot of celebration once the war ended?

JE: Oh yeah

WC: Do you remember anything about the death of President Roosevelt?

JE: Yeah, I was in the U.S, oh in London when he died, yeah. That's about all I really remember. But I remember three of them died in a month, you know. The world Shepards, read Zechariah eleven-eight. Three Shepards got destroyed in one month. April nineteen forty-five. Roosevelt, Mussolini and Hitler. Roosevelt was the fourteen of April, Mussolini was the twenty-eight I believe, and Hitler was the thirtieth.

WC: Now when did you go back home.

JF: Uh boy that was a long haul, we were I a replacement depot. We were supposed to be in an airplane back, but we had one problem after another. Guys going to the hospital you know, we finally radioed the operator, I said we might as well split up the crew and take the boat home or something. So that's what happened, Laurance, our radio operator and I came home on the first trip on the Europa. That was the, I even remember Germany had two luxury liners and Europa was one of them and Bramon was the other. I think it brough six thousand I guess, and we came home on that.

WC: Whereabouts where you discharged from?

JE: That was a camp Dix wasn't it, [unclear] I think it was fort dix. I think I was discharged from there.

WC: Ok so you were discharged and then you came back home.

JE: Yes

WC: Now did you make use of the GI bill?

JE: Well I went to Cornell for a year and a half and I meet her, shes a Plainsman [laugh]
[unclear]

WC: Ok so you went to Cornell and than went back to the farms?

JE: Yes

WC: Now did you join any veterans organizations?

JE: No I didn't, I didn't join the American Legions that I just did here a whole ago. I should join, but the thing of it is, is that money is getting tight.

WC: Did you stay in contact with anyone you was In the service in?

JE: Yeah later,yeah.. [unclear] took these pictures, hes still alive and Rollins Montana he was from Kansas down in Russell,Kansas. All the officers are gone, the navigator, pilot,co-piolate.

Female Voice: Name your crew.

JE: Well Lieutenant Cheatham, Nawl Cheatham was the poliet, James Benson was the copilote. Benson was from chicago and cheatham was from Gadson, Alabama. Right where I was stationed and Jim shipment was the navigator and he got killed in a airplane crash right after the war. Than Malcom Lawrence is still in washington D.C. He got a good job wth the state department.

Female Voice: Didn't he have nine kids [laugh]

JE: Max Yellowonie was ball gunner, he took the [unclear] off after the first five missions. Something like that, it was an experiment, so they had bumped into him. Then there's a one-way scudder was Randell Bennett for all I know I guess he is still in a home in Chicago. He was from Russell, Kansas, but now he is out in Montana. White fish I think and then the [unclear] armor was Howard Woloson. I hear from him once a year, he just lost his wife last year.

WC: Did you attend any reunions?

JE: I went to a reunion, yeah. Out to... That was quite a thing too, that was Dayton, Ohio. Of course, we went to the Airforce Museum there. You can spend days there. They had a B thirty-six there. I was just amazed at that thing, but that nothing now. It had about six pushers and twenty-four jets on the wing tip.

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

JE: I oh, I probably made me more conservative than. People don't seem to be, they seem to be sort of laws of sleep in these times now that we are living in. Were in the most dangerous times that I think we have been in, in our entire history, we are in real danger. I was watching a tape of uh, well it's a Christian tape. It's about chick smith from California and different pastors talking about the end of times. And especially in Israel Benjamin the prime minister in Netanyahu. Say America better wake up or first thing we know it will be too late. The atomic bomb is not all that hard to make. I guess as I understand it. [unclear] A madman, if they get the nuke and dissolve a bomb, they can.

It's only a matter of time, they can wipe Israel and the united states off the face of the earth. They will come right out and sell it; they don't mess around.

WC: Do you think you would have gone to college if it wasn't for GI Bill?

JE: Do I think I would have gone to college, that's... I don't know, I don't know. I didn't get that much out of the GI either. I guess I got books.

WC: Did you buy a home on the GI Bill?

JE: No, I lived with my parents on the farm and then we finally took over.

Female Voice: we bought the farm

JE: yeah, we bought the farm.

WC: Do you want to hold up those photographs and tell us when and where they were taken?

JE: Well, this was taken in Emeril, and this was done by my buddy and I. We were going to mechanic school. The air force was known for having pretty good food, so we [unclear], consequently the reason I look so chubby there, is weight one hundred and seventy pounds. About thirty pounds overweight. The second time we went to the chow line we just got the stuff we liked, you know. The chocolate cake and so forth, and these two pictures here are two picture that the tail ginner, he had a little thirty-five-millimeter camera, he took a lot of pictures of the formations and stuff. these were taken over Germany. He had a couple negatives he found, and the lasers printed them, and they didn't turn out so bad. Block A was the ninety fourth bomb group that's stood for the ninety fourth. Yeah, but he has a lot of films, and they are all Mil dude because he was afraid to develop it. They were developed in England so nicely. That means he sent it to me after he had been home had been home for quite a while, in fact it was only 10 years ago.

WC: Now did you like that B-seventeen?

JE: oh, it was a great airplane, probably one of the best airplanes ever built. Very honest and dazzled.

WC: Have you been up on one since the war at all?

JE: No, my daughter, our youngest daughter just got a ride.

WC: Yeah, I just got a ride last summer up in Schenectady.

JE: Oh, was it the accountant's foundation?

WC: Well, it was the EEA

JE: The young and overcast, well they were a great airplane, I love that airplane. Far as I'm concerned it was the best power ever built. You know it was stable and before a stall it gave you a lot of warning. Big wings, it was just a real airplane and really good airplane, I think it saved a lot of lives really with its ruggedness.

WC: I've seen some film footage of some of the B-seventeenths coming back to England. It was a wonder they continued to fly. Some of them the nose would be gone, the tail gone.

WC: Alright so thank you very much for your interview.

JE: You're welcome.