

**James Bottum**  
**Narrator**

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

**Interviewed on January 26, 2010**  
**Beverwyck Terrace Senior Homes**  
**Slingerlands, NY**

James Bottum           JB  
Wayne Clark           WC

**WC:** Today is the 26<sup>th</sup> of January 2010. We are at the Beverwyck Terrace Senior Homes in Slingerlands, New York. My name is Wayne Clarke; I'm with the New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center in Saratoga Sprigs, New York. Sir, for the record would you please state your full name and your date and place of birth, please.

**JB:** James Bottum, born in Cohoes, New York.

**WC:** And when were you born?

**JB:** October 23, 1923

**WC:** Did you attend school in Cohoes?

**JB:** Yes.

**WC:** What year did you graduate from high school, approximately?

**JB:** 1941.

**WC:** Do you remember where you were and what your reaction was when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor.

**JB:** I think I was going to an aviation ground school in Elmira, New York. I don't remember what my reaction was.

**WC:** This was after you graduated from high school?

**JB:** Yes, it was run by the government.

**WC:** So you were interested in becoming a pilot at that point?

**JB:** Yes

**WC:** At that point did you go on to college or go into the service?

**JB:** I went into the service.

**WC:** And how far did you get with your flight training before you entered the service?

**JB:** Nothing. I did it all in the navy.

**WC:** And when did you enter the service, approximately? I guess you went in July of '42.

**JB:** Yes, I didn't go on an active duty until January of '43. And I was supposed to go right to the flight training but between the time I enlisted and I got called to duty they had six more [unclear] programs so I went to Colgate University for three months.

**WC:** So you went into the Navy?

**JB:** Yes.

**WC:** Why did you pick the Navy? Was it because of the flight program they had.

**JB:** Yes.

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

**JB:** I went to Colgate first in something called flight preparatory and I think the reason for that was they had so many people enlisted they didn't know what to do with them they instituted these stupid programs where we did nothing but go to school and I went to Cornell three month, that's where I learned to fly, in Ithaca.

**WC:** You learned on the J3 Cub.

**JB:** Yes.

**WC:** What did you think of the Cub?

**JB:** Nice and light.

**WC:** Do you recall how long it took you to solo?

**JB:** Eight Hours I think.

**WC:** Once you completed that program where did you go next?

**JB:** I went to Colgate first which was three months of just schooling, then I went to Cornell where I learned to fly. Went to Chapel Hill for their preflight program which was a bunch of junk, athletics and all that. Then I went to Glendale Illinois to primary.

**WC:** What type of aircraft did you fly in primary?

**JB:** N3N's they were called. They were two seated biplanes.

**WC:** The Stearman?

**JB:** I flew the Stearman and the other was an N3N, but I never knew who made it.

**WC:** What did you think of the Stearman?

**JB:** It was a very nice airplane. Easy to fly. A lot of fun. Then I went to Corpus Christi [Texas] is where I got my wings.

**WC:** What did you fly at Corpus Christi?

**JB:** SNJ's.

**WC:** That was, I believe the AT6?

**JB:** Yes, the AT6 in the Army and SNJ in the Navy, just to be different.

**WC:** And what did you think of the AT6?

**JB:** Very nice plane.

**WC:** Was it a hot aircraft?

**JB:** Semi. It was nice.

**WC:** Pretty fast?

**JB:** Yes, and it was low winged. You could do acrobatics in it. Nice Airplane to fly.

**WC:** You got your wings and were you commissioned at that point?

**JB:** Yes as a ensign.

**WC:** Where were you sent next?

**JB:** I think I went to Miami. [unclear] taken to Miami where I flew torpedo bombers.

**WC:** So you didn't do any carrier flying?

**JB:** Not then, but I did do carrier flying, yes. I never was stationed on a carrier. But we usually go on the Great Lakes and do it up on Glenview Naval Air Station.

**WC:** Now that torpedo bomber, what kind of plane was that? Was that the Douglas Dauntless?

**JB:** No that was a dive bomber. It was an Avenger.

**WC:** When were you shipped overseas? Was it in '43 or '44? Probably '44.

**JB:** '44, I graduated in '44 from flight school. I went three months in the operational. Then I went to a squadron. That was a replacement squadron in Saipan.

**WC:** When you left the states where did you leave out of? Did you leave from the West Coast?

**JB:** San Diego, I believe.

**WC:** You went by boat? Or did you fly?

**JB:** I think we flew by a carrier.

**WC:** Did you stop in Hawaii at all?

**JB:** Yes. Flew out of there for a while and then went to Saipan.

**WC:** What was it like on Saipan? Was there a lot of action there when you arrived?

**JB:** No. There was a war there. We put a base there with a replacement squadron and carriers would come in. If they needed pilots they would take them out and pull them.

**WC:** What was life like for you on Saipan.

**JB:** It was nice. They killed all the bugs and it was just beautiful. Nice weather all the time.

**WC:** What kind of living conditions did you have?

**JB:** In a Quonset hut.

**WC:** Any problems with snakes or scorpions?

**JB:** No.

**WC:** At that point were there still Japanese on the island? Snipers or anything like that?

**JB:** No. I think the closest ones were on an island called Yap. Where they were left. The Japanese just left them there. So we would go over and bomb them every once in a while.

**WC:** What was your first mission like?

**JB:** No opposition or nothing, we just went in and bombed.

**WC:** You flew with a crew of two?

**JB:** Yes, a turret gunner and a gunner in the belly, a radio man in the belly, he had a thirty caliber sticking up.

**WC:** and you flew with a pilot and copilot?

**JB:** No, just me.

**WC:** Were you ever under attack by of any of the Japanese planes.

**JB:** No.

**WC:** What about ground fire?

**JB:** It mostly near the end of the war. I think the whole place was pretty much conquered by then.

**WC:** Do you recall where you were when you heard about the death of President Roosevelt?

**JB:** Gosh no, I don't know. When was it?

**WC:** I believe he passed away in April of '45.

**JB:** I had to be in the Pacific somewhere. Exactly where, I don't know.

**WC:** When you heard the Germany surrendered did you think the war would be over soon after that.

**JB:** I don't think I gave it a thought.

**WC:** How long were missions, generally, when you flew?

**JB:** I was just in a replacement squadron. I never got into any action at all. We just went up and flew the [unclear].

**WC:** So basically just training missions?

**JB:** Yes. At the time we weren't losing any aircraft anymore.

**WC:** What did you think of when heard about the dropping of the atomic bomb? Did you have any idea how devastating one bomb could be?

**JB:** No. Not at all. I don't think anybody did at the time until they dropped it.

**WC:** Most people didn't, no. When Japan surrendered was there a lot of celebration in the unit?

**JB:** I don't think so. It was inevitable, you know.

**WC:** How long had you been overseas before the war ended?

**JB:** I can't remember. Six months maybe.

**WC:** Did you get shipped home right away?

**JB:** I flew back to the States for a while.

**WC:** Once the war had ended, how long were you in Saipan for or did you go home right away?

**JB:** No, I came back to the States. I think I came back to Nevada. I stayed with my squadron in Nevada before I got discharged.

**WC:** While you were overseas did you see any USO shows or any celebrities or anything like that?

**JB:** Not that had made much of an impression on me. I think I might have, but I don't know. That was a long time ago.

**WC:** You said you were sent back to the States and to Nevada before you were discharged? Did you do any flying in Nevada?

**JB:** Yes

**WC:** How long were you there for?

**JB:** I can't remember, a few months.

**WC:** You were discharged in 1945

**JB:** Yes.

**WC:** Where were you discharged from?

**JB:** I'll be darned if I know. I can't remember.

**WC:** You mentioned once you were discharged you joined the Reserves.

**JB:** I stayed in the Reserves, yes.

**WC:** And you continued to fly?

**JB:** Yes, I would fly down in a field in New York.

**WC:** What types of aircrafts did you fly?

**JB:** We just flew the trainer, the AT6. That was the Army designation and the SNJ in the Navy.

**WC:** Did you eventually get checked out in jets?

**JB:** No

**WC:** You didn't fly jets. How many years did you spend in the Reserves?

**JB:** Twenty-three I think. I came back and I joined a public relations company around there, just to get my twenty years in.

**WC:** What rank were you when you retired?

**JB:** Full Lieutenant.

**WC:** When you got out of the military initially did you make use of the G.I. Bill at all?

**JB:** Yes, I went to Siena College.

**WC:** What did you get your degree in?

**JB:** Business. Accounting I think.

**WC:** Did you stay in contact with any of the people you were in the service with?

**JB:** Yes, two of them in particular.

**WC:** Did you join any veteran's organizations?

**JB:** No

**WC:** Did you ever attend any kind of reunions?

**JB:** No, not really.

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

**JB:** I always wanted to learn how to fly and I did.

**WC:** Do you think if it hadn't have been for the service you wouldn't have been able to fly?

**JB:** I'm sure I wouldn't.

**WC:** Did you do any flying as a civilian or just strictly military?

**JB:** Just while I was in the Reserve. [unclear] but I stayed in the Reserve

**WC:** What kind of work did you do in civilian life?

**JB:** I worked for the State. The tax department, I was a tax examiner.

**WC:** You retired from the State?

**JB:** Yes.

**WC:** How long ago did you retire?

**JB:** I think I was sixty-one when I retired and I'm eighty-six now so it was quite a long time ago.

**WC:** Were you married at all.

**JB:** Yes, I'm Married and I have five kids.

**WC:** Is your wife still...

**JB:** No, she passed away.

**WC:** Any grandchildren?

**JB:** Nine, I think. One great grandchild.

**WC:** Anything else you would like to mention concerning your military experiences?

**JB:** No, except that I had a good time there. I enjoyed it.

**WC:** Now who are these gentleman; Julian Foster, Jack Crystal, and Charles Sypher?

**JB:** They had four people on what was called a combat team and those were the three men I was with.

**WC:** Did you fly with that group mostly?

**JB:** Yes.

**WC:** Now your aircraft, did it have a name painted on it or any kind of nose art?

**JB:** No. I had flown them with names on them but I never put one on.

**WC:** Do you still have your World War II flight jacket?

**JB:** As far as I know. Unless somebody stole it.

**WC:** Does it still fit you?

**JB:** Sure.

**WC:** Thank you so much for your interview.