

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JAMES CHATHAM
Pilot, Air Force, Berlin Airlift and Korean War
2001

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Auby, John A., Jr., (1931-). Oral History Interview, 2001.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 30 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 30 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 30 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

James Chatham, a Wauwatosa, Wisconsin native, tells of his Air Force service with the 330th Troop Carrier during the Berlin Airlift and the Korean War. He discusses enlisting in the Air Force to gain additional job skills. Chatham relates his initial training as a weather observer including use of weather observation instruments and plotting weather maps. He notes he arrived in time to clean up B26 parts after a tornado went through the airfield. He tells of his experience flying weather observation flights from Travis Air Force Base (California) to Alaska and Japan and transmitting data. Chatham details his role as a lead mechanic and flight engineer with the 330th Troop Carrier during the Berlin Airlift. He gives details of the mission, including unloading the planes while taxiing, danger from rubble in landing zones, and Soviet aircraft intervening by “buzzing” American planes. Chatham discusses his re-enlistment in the Air Force as a sergeant with the 330th Squadron in Seoul (Korea) and flying supplies from Japan to Seoul. He recalls being in Seoul when the Korean War started and flying out casualties. He recounts his wounding when his plane was struck by arms fire and his parachute failed to fully deploy from 1000 feet high. With broken arms, legs, and back, he was sent back to Travis Air Force Base where he recalled spending eighteen months in a full body cast and receiving a "Dear John" letter from his girlfriend. He discusses receiving a disability discharge, using the GI Bill for school and a home loan, and joining veterans' organizations.

Biographical Sketch:

James Chatham (b.1931) served with the United States Air Force during the Berlin Airlift and the Korean War. He achieved the rank of sergeant before receiving a disability discharge. He currently lives in Waukesha, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2001.

Transcribed by Hannah Goodno, 2009.

Abstract by Susan Krueger, 2010.

Interview Transcript:

Jim: Okay, we're off and running. This is 20 April, year of 2001, talking to Jim Chatham. When were you born, Jim?

Chatham: January 5th, 1931.

Jim: Where was that?

Chatham: In Wauwatosa.

Jim: And when did you enter the military service?

Chatham: January 7th, 1948.

Jim: And what prompted that? It was not wartime, it was peacetime.

Chatham: Well, I had—at that time I was going to the Milwaukee tech school taking airplane mechanics. And felt that I could take and get more training and get more experience and that by going into the service.

Jim: I see. So you went down and enlisted in the Air Force?

Chatham: That's correct.

Jim: You just went to Milwaukee and signed up?

Chatham: Yeah.

Jim: Then where did they send you to train?

Chatham: Well, I went to Fort Sheridan first, then down to Lackland Air Force base in San Antonio, Texas.

Jim: And did they teach you a skill so you became a specialist in something?

Chatham: Well, after basic, I went to weather observer's school in Tinkerfield, Oklahoma.

Jim: Weather observers?

Chatham: Yep.

Jim: And had you had any experience in any of that?

Chatham: No, not really.

Jim: Oh, my. Well that's a skill I haven't talked to anybody who had before. Tell me about what kind of training you went through.

Chatham: Well, you learn how to take and plot maps. You also learn how to take and actually use different instruments that are necessary in forecasting weather.

Jim: Did you send up balloons?

Chatham: We'd send up balloons with the instruments in it and retrieve the instruments in that afterwards. And we had to take and plot different fronts that were approaching in one thing and another.

Jim: Well, I can't think of a better place to learn about weather than right in tornado alley where you had your training.

Chatham: [Laughs] Right. And when I got there, it was shortly after a tornado had gone through. And one of our first jobs was to take and pick up pieces of B-29s that were scattered about.

Jim: Oh my Lord. The tornado hit 'em when they were on the ground?

Chatham: Yep.

Jim: Oh, boy. I'll bet that really made a mess of them.

Chatham: It did. And so far as it goes, there were over 300 B-29s there at the time and out of that, there were 76 that were completely destroyed.

Jim: Went right through across the airfield?

Chatham: Yep.

Jim: Boy, that cost all of us taxpayers a lot of dough.

Chatham: It did. And you got to learn firsthand some of the parts of the planes and how heavy they can be. [Both laugh]

Jim: Pickin' them up.

Chatham: Yeah.

Jim: So everybody had a turn too to pick all that stuff up.

Chatham: Right.

- Jim: Didn't make a difference whether you're a weatherman or not, you had to [unintelligible] and start pickin' stuff up.
- Chatham: [Laughs] That's right.
- Jim: How long did that take you to retrieve the pieces of 76 airplanes?
- Chatham: Ah, so far as it goes, we were on that detail for two weeks.
- Jim: Wow, well that must have spread well beyond the airfield.
- Chatman: Oh yeah, yeah. They were scattered around Oklahoma City, and other parts beyond.
- Jim: So an engine drops in someone's backyard, [Chatham laughs] and—gosh, that's terrible. Oh my. So anyway, with all this weather skill, what'd they do with ya?
- Chatham: Well, from there I went to what was called Fairfield Susan, it's now called Travis Air Force Base. Out in California. And there I was doing weather flights going on up to Alaska and over to Japan and that.
- Jim: Were you with a special unit?
- Chatham: Well, we were a weather observer squadron.
- Jim: What was that called? What was that number or whatever?
- Chatham: Oh, I don't recall right offhand.
- Jim: But it was a squadron that was weather people, right?
- Chatham: Right.
- Jim: And you flew out as far as Alaska?
- Chatham: Yep, Alaska and over to Japan and that in our—doing our weather work.
- Jim: What kind of an airplane?
- Chatham: B-29s.
- Jim: Did those trips last several days?

- Chatham: Well, we'd take off, and they would last—we'd end up up in Alaska, oh, the next day, and then we'd go on over to Tokyo and that. Spend a day over there, and then made our return trip.
- Jim: Now, on these flights, were you working? I mean, were you collecting weather data—
- Chatham: Yes.
- Jim: --in flight?
- Chatman: Right. And we would take and—even when there was tornadoes or so, we would fly into the eye.
- Jim: How many people operated—did you have in the B-29 besides yourself?
- Chatham: There were four observers, the pilot, co-pilot, and the flight engineer. So we had a crew of 7.
- Jim: You had a lot of room then.
- Chatham: Oh yeah. [Laughs] But we needed it because [unintelligible] with all the instruments we had in there as well as turning around and trying to get some sleep.
- Jim: Right. Were you sort of on duty 4 and then off 4, or did they have any regulation about that?
- Chatham: No regulation. It was up to each one to work it out.
- Jim: Well, depends on what time of the day it was, I'm sure. And you couldn't do too much at night.
- Chatham: Well, you'd be surprised. You can do an awful lot at night.
- Jim: Oh really?
- Chatham: Yeah.
- Jim: Would it be like picking up moisture from the air or what? I don't understand what you could pick up.
- Chatham: Well, so far as it goes, you're taking and always picking up information and that through your instruments and relaying the information back to your base or to some airbase and that that is close by.

- Jim: I see. Did you record any of this, or did you send everything direct back?
- Chatham: No, we recorded it.
- Jim: Sure.
- Chatham: And at that time there with the—some of the machines that we were using and that—some of the instruments that we were using, some of these went electronically right back to our home base.
- Jim: Sure. So you were just transferring the information [unintelligible].
- Chatham: Yeah.
- Jim: So did you operate on a screen of some kind and that sort of deal? Or, what was your specific mission in that airplane?
- Chatham: My specific mission in that plane there was as an observer, which was to read off the instruments that we had and to relay this information back to our home base.
- Jim: By radio?
- Chatham: By radio.
- Jim: I see. And some of these missions in the air would then be often how long? 10 or 12 hours? Or less?
- Chatham: So far as the actual flying time? The actual flying time would be on an average 12 hours.
- Jim: 12 hours. Okay. And so how long did you do that from Travis Air Force Base?
- Chatham: Well, I did that until early part of 1949—I think it was about February of '49 when they asked for volunteers and that for the Berlin Airlift.
- Jim: Volunteers? They just didn't send you?
- Chatham: Ah, so far as it goes, first off, they asked for volunteers.
- Jim: And what did they tell you you were gonna do, just gonna help?
- Chatman: No, they didn't tell us anything. They just asked for volunteers for Germany. And so a bunch of us volunteered right—it meant out of the country!

- Jim: Sure, something new, something different. So they flew you over to Frankfurt?
- Chatham: Yep, and I was stationed in Frankfurt. Some of the crews went over to Wiesbaden. And some went to a base south of us a little ways.
- Jim: And now tell me what you were doing there. Still weather?
- Chatham: Nope—
- Jim: I didn't think so.
- Chatham: Nope, there we became the 330th Troop Carrier. And we were flying food, coal, and that from Frankfurt into Berlin.
- Jim: C-54s?
- Chatham: C-54s, C-47s.
- Jim: Right.
- Chatham: And we—it was really surprising and that to take and see the trucks as we landed in Berlin, start rolling right alongside the planes as the planes were taxiing. And some of the POW—or, not the POWs—the DPs [Displaced Persons], the Polish DPs and that would take and climb onboard the plane and start unloading while we were still taxiing.
- Jim: They'd start throwing the stuff off on the trucks as you were taxiing in?
- Chatham: Yep, right.
- Jim: So you never really turned the engines off?
- Chatham: We—by the time we got to where we were supposed to, we would turn off the engines just long enough to gas up.
- Jim: And then back to Frankfurt?
- Chatham: And then back to Frankfurt.
- Jim: And then when you got back to Frankfurt, they were ready to load you up again?
- Chatham: Right.

Jim: Did this go on 24 hours a day?

Chatham: Yes it did.

Jim: And how about Jim Chatham, now you can't go on 24 hours a day. How did your schedule work out?

Chatham: Well, we worked usually 3 flights each day.

Jim: Continuous? Non-stop?

Chatham: Right.

Jim: So that would consume—how long are those flights? About an hour? Or less?

Chatham: Oh, so far as it goes, at that time there, the flights with—oh, little over an hour. 'Bout an hour and 15 minutes—hour and a half.

Jim: Hour and a half. So three of those and you'd done almost a day's work.

Chatham: Right.

Jim: And then you'd be off the rest of the day? But you were back at it the next day.

Chatham: Yep. And you were on standby even if you were off just incase somebody got sick or so—

Jim: Oh, that's right. Okay, now what was your job on this peacekeeping mission?

Chatham: I was a flight engineer at that time.

Jim: I need more specific—

Chatham: Well, I was the one that would fly on the plane and that. Flying in through into—between Frankfurt and Berlin. And then I was the head mechanic and that on the ground.

Jim: Oh I see, so your concern was—

Chatham: To keep that plane operating.

Jim: Keep it operating. Make sure all the guys took care of it.

- Chatham: Right.
- Jim: Did they require a lot of attention?
- Chatham: Yes they did, because of the way that we were flying and that in all kinds of weather. And a lot of times we were being buzzed by Russian planes while we were in our corridor.
- Jim: Tell me how that went, tell me how they would do that, as an example.
- Chatham: Well, we had an incident here just recently with the Chinese. The pictures that were shown on television were just about the same way that the Russians were flying by our planes when we would be in the corridor on the way to Berlin.
- Jim: Well, I know, but I wanna know how—what side of you they came on and how close and—
- Chatham: They would take and be on both sides of us and—
- Jim: One on each side?
- Chatham: Yes. And they would take and be wingtip to wingtip with our plane.
- Jim: Would you strike your wingtips or not?
- Chatham: Sometimes, and they would take and motion for us to go down. They would take and be flying right alongside of us and they would take and point down. And sometimes they would take and actually fly on top of us and try and force to go down.
- Jim: So they just bored on ahead, right?
- Chatham: Yep, and we lost a few planes and that.
- Jim: They make a mistake and hit you like the Japanese thing? I mean the Chinese thing?
- Chatham: Yep, as well as the planes that were lost landing in Berlin and that, because of all of the—
- Jim: The bad weather?
- Chatham: Well, it was a combination of bad weather, it was also the obstructions that were there. Because you had a lot of ruins and that that were still in existence at that time.

- Jim: Landing in Berlin meant that you were—you couldn't have a gradual approach, you had to suddenly drop down and put it in there, is that how you did it?
- Chatham: That's about it, yeah.
- Jim: Yeah, because you couldn't have a long approach, because of all the houses and buildings, right?
- Chatham: Yep.
- Jim: Well, that took a great deal of skill for those pilots.
- Chatham: It did. And there wasn't a time that we landed that any of us weren't scared. We didn't know if we were gonna make it or not. And this included even when we took off from there.
- Jim: Because, primarily what was your main concern here?
- Chatham: Well, our main concern in actually landing there and taking off from there was the rubble and buildings and that that were around because there were people still living in them even though they were bombed out shelters—or bombed out buildings.
- Jim: And you were afraid that you might strike on coming in or taking off? Misjudge your distance or something.
- Chatham: Well, you didn't have enough power, or the wind hit ya just wrong and that, and you could very well hit one.
- Jim: So the landings and take-offs were really exciting.
- Chatham: Yes. [Laughs]
- Jim: Every one, I mean—
- Chatham: Every one was different. And you'd thank God every day that you made it through another day.
- Jim: How many days did you do that, Jim?
- Chatham: Well, I did that from February of 1949 until the Berlin Airlift ended.
- Jim: The whole thing?

- Chatham: The whole thing.
- Jim: Did your unit get a special citation?
- Chatham: Yes, we had a unit citation that we received. And each one—well, one of the awards that we got and that was the medal for humane action, as well as the occupation ribbon with the Berlin Airlift—
- Jim: Oh, special designation?
- Chatham: Yes.
- Jim: Tell me, you didn't write down, what was the name of that outfit of transport in Frankfurt?
- Chatham: That was the 330th Troop Carrier.
- Jim: 330th Troop Carrier. Boy, you must've been tired when that was done. That was tough, tough duty.
- Chatham: It was, but you take and you felt real good about it.
- Jim: Because you were doing something.
- Chatham: Well, you felt good about it because of the way things ended with them finally taking and opening up the Autobahns.
- Jim: Did any of those Russian planes hit some of those transports?
- Chatham: Yes, yes they—
- Jim: They obviously didn't hit you 'cause you didn't crash, but I mean, they did manage to hit some.
- Chatham: Yes, matter of fact, there was one plane in our squadron that lost a wing.
- Jim: Did they just drop down, and knocked it off?
- Chatham: Hit it with its landing gear and that, knocking the wing—hitting it in such a way that the tip of the wing busted off and, as a result, the plane went down. We lost the crew.
- Jim: You lost a crew. Right. No response from the Russians for that?
- Chatham: No, no way. They never said they were sorry. Matter of fact—

- Jim: They weren't sorry.
- Chatham: The pilot that did it—somebody managed to get a picture of him with a big smile on his face.
- Jim: Sure, he knocked down a plane. Bad times, bad times. So after—did you get any leave time after that? You must've.
- Chatham: No, not really. We stayed together and we started back home. I was getting' to be a sharp timer and that. I had about 6 months left of my enlistment to go.
- Jim: You had a 2-year enlistment?
- Chatham: Three. And we turn around and there were a few of us that talked about re-enlisting. And it was a great bunch of guys, and I really enjoyed being with them. We were family.
- Jim: And you were single?
- Chatham: Yep, I was.
- Jim: Why not?
- Chatham: So, when we got back, I re-enlisted for six.
- Jim: Six years? Boy, you really were fit.
- Chatham: Well, I was going to make a career out of it at that time.
- Jim: Your rank by that time was what?
- Chatham: At that time there, I was a _____[?]. Then we turn around and we went on over to Japan first, after I re-enlisted. And we were flying supplies and that into Korea.
- Jim: Same outfit? 330th?
- Chatham: Right.
- Jim: Based in Japan?
- Chatham: Based in Tokyo at the time, yeah.
- Jim: Flying C-54s to Korea?

- Chatham: Right.
- Jim: To Phu Son[??]?
- Chatham: To Seoul.
- Jim: To Seoul. Well that was before the war then.
- Chatham: Yep, as a matter of fact the war broke out in Korea. I was in Seoul. There was three of our crews in Seoul at the time.
- Jim: Oh! This is a good—man! You're the first guy I've talked to that was in Korea when the war started. Now tell me about that day you found out that you were in war.
- Chatham: Well, the day that I found out, there were a bunch of casualties being brought into the airbase. And we—what was going on, we were asked to take and fly 'em back to Japan.
- Jim: What kind? You mean American casualties or--?
- Chatham: Yes.
- Jim: And you wondered, "how the hell did they get hurt?"
- Chatham: Yeah, we were wondering, because there were so many of them.
- Jim: And there wasn't a war or anything, so—
- Chatham: And then we could take and hear the shelling and that going on and we still didn't know what was happening because we hadn't heard anything. And then I—we were taking some of the casualties out. We were flying them out.
- Jim: Didn't you talk to 'em? What were those guys saying?
- Chatham: Well, we had ten on our plane, a nurse, and a corpsman. And they were all busy and that [unintelligible] we got the stretchers in, we had to take and fasten 'em down, and one thing and another. We had to deck 'em. Had 'em three high. And we turn around and we were taking off, and by that time, there was fightin' going on on the airfield. And as we were taking off, it's assumed—I can only assume it, I don't really know myself—that we were hit by ground fire. We got to a height of between 500 and 1000 feet. On this plane, my position was in between the pilot and the co-pilot as the flight engineer. From there, I really don't recall much. I was informed later on—a couple years later in Milwaukee by a

man who was the tank commander of a tank that picked me up after our plane blew up. And he said that mine was the only chute out of the plane and my parachute never opened. It roman-candled, which means it never fully blossomed. And when he picked me up, he picked me up because I was an American and he was taking me—he thought I was dead. Because of the height that I had fallen.

Jim: We'll have to stop and go back here. All of a sudden you were 1000 feet up and rising, and then an explosion?

Chatham: And the explosion took place.

Jim: They hit you with something—

Chatham: According to what we can figure, it was no any aircraft fire in that it had to be some ground fire and that as we were taking off.

Jim: Well how did that make your plane explode? Ground fire generally doesn't unless they hit something.

Chatham: Well, they hit the engines. It will take and—

Jim: It wouldn't explode.

Chatham: Depending on what they hit on the engines. Or if they hit a fuel tank.

Jim: But you don't even remember any explosion at all?

Chatham: No.

Jim: And from that moment until they picked you off the ground, you don't remember falling the—

Chatham: I don't remember anything. Until—

Jim: You semi-parachuted 1000 feet and survived, is that what we're saying?

Chatham: That's right.

Jim: Jesus Christ.

Chatham: And then I turned around and—

Jim: How'd you ever survive that?!

Chatham: Well, when he picked me up, and these were his words, he said, “we thought we were picking up a corpse. We did not know you were alive until we got you back to an aid station.”

Jim: You were the only one who survived that plane?

Chatham: Right.

Jim: And you had casualties and the nurse and the corpsman and all that and the pilot, and you are the only one in that plane that survived?

Chatham: Yes.

Jim: I don't know how you did that. I'm sure you don't either.

Chatham: No, I don't.

Jim: Okay now tell me what injuries you suffered. I mean, they got you to the hospital and they found what?

Chatham: Uh, just about every bone in my body was broke.

Jim: Well, I'm sure not all of them, but both legs?

Chatham: Both legs, both arms.

Jim: Were broken?

Chatham: Yep. I ended up—

Jim: Do you understand the difference between simple and compound fractures?

Chatham: They were compound fractures in both.

Jim: In other words, they broke the skin and they were sticking out?

Chatham: Yep.

Jim: You understand that.

Chatham: Yep.

Jim: Okay. All four compound fractures?

Chatham: As far as I was informed.

Jim: Okay. Well you must have been plastered. [Laughs]

Chatham: Yep, I was in a complete body cast for the better part of eighteen months.

Jim: Your back broken too?

Chatham: Yes.

Jim: Jesus Christ! Do you recall how many vertebrae were fractured or did they tell you that?

Chatham: No.

Jim: But you're sure some of the bones in your back were broken too?

Chatham: Yeah. From what I've been able to get a hold of—

Jim: Got a hold of those medical records?

Chatham: Not all of them.

Jim: But they would tell you if [unintelligible]. Did you suffer any cuts or any bleeding particularly? How did that [unintelligible]?

Chatham: Well I had received head injuries and that and I was—

Jim: How long were you unconscious?

Chatham: Well I was unconscious for three days.

Jim: So when you came to did you have any idea where the hell you were?

Chatham: I didn't know where I was, I really didn't know who I was. And when I came back and that, I was at Travis Air Force Base when I tried reaching my folks to let them know that I was home and that. And of course, I hadn't gotten paid for about six months because all of our records and that were lost. So I tried calling my folks collect, just to have them refuse to accept charges. I got back to my room, and I found a "Dear John" letter.

Jim: From your best girlfriend?

Chatham: Yep. Girl I'd gone with for seven years.

- Jim: You were all set to marry in a month or two or something? Whatever—well, that was a great day. And did your parents know that you had been injured?
- Chatham: No.
- Jim: The Air Force didn't notify them that you were in the hospital?
- Chatham: They—I don't know. Because of the fact that I was—what was taking place back here, I didn't know.
- Jim: Oh, well I thought maybe you talked to them later, that the folks may have gotten a message saying you had been wounded or something.
- Chatham: Yeah, my mother and dad had separated when I was 11 months old so there wasn't too much communication between the two of them.
- Jim: I see. But as far as you know, neither of them got a bad news letter from the Air Force saying that you were either dead or wounded.
- Chatham: Well, I found out sometime later that my mother had received word from the hospital that I was there.
- Jim: Okay, well that's good. Well so you were—when you first left Korea, they took you to Japan and you were in the hospital for a couple months there before you went back to the United States?
- Chatham: Yeah, I was there for a while before I went back to Hawaii. Then I was in Hawaii for a while before I came back to the states.
- Jim: When did they get that plaster off of ya? Get ya movin' around?
- Chatham: I was down in Alabama when they took that off. That was a year and a half later.
- Jim: You were in a body cast for a year and a half?
- Chatham: Yep.
- Jim: Boy, your back was certainly broken. But your arms by that time should have been in pretty good shape.
- Chatham: Yeah, they were.
- Jim: So you could get up and walk in a way.

Chatham: Yep.

Jim: So your only problem when you got down to Alabama was just healing your back.

Chatham: Right.

Jim: And all your bodily functions worked otherwise okay? You could eat and all that?

Chatham: Yeah, because I was undergoing therapy and that while I was—

Jim: Right. So you must have been one of the very first guys wounded in the Korean War.

Chatham: Well, I was one of the first in the Air Force, I would say.

Jim: Well, I would say, yes. I would say. [Laughs] My, what an experience. It's terrible. I still can't believe you lived through that. So then you still had some duty time? They didn't want to discharge you did they? Or did they what?

Chatham: Well, with the injuries I had sustained and that, we had talked about my staying in, but they'd turn around, and at that time the Air Force was still a new branch of service. They limited duty and that—they really didn't—

Jim: Have a spot for you?

Chatham: Not really.

Jim: So they encouraged you to—

Chatham: They encouraged me to leave. [Laughs]

Jim: Before your six years was up?

Chatham: Yep. I had served a little over two years but I got out December 24th. That was my Christmas present from the government.

Jim: December 24th of--?

Chatham: 1952.

Jim: '52. So most of your Korean experience was spent in a hospital.

Chatham: Yep.

- Jim: My, my, my, my, my. Have you kept in contact with anybody on the 330th?
- Chatham: I tried to take and contact some of them. And, matter of fact, after I got out of the hospital, I went around to the homes of the guys in my outfit, visiting either their wives or their parents or so. And I found out that there were quite a few of them that didn't come back.
- Jim: And after you got out, did you use your G.I. Bill?
- Chatham: I used it for training to become an automotive buyer for an auto accessories store in Syracuse, New York. And I also used my G.I. Bill to buy a home.
- Jim: Get a loan, [unintelligible]
- Chatham: And I went back to school and learned accounting so that after a while I became an accountant.
- Jim: Well you used it very wisely I think. That's very good. So you had a job and a career [unintelligible]. Then you found another girl and got married, right?
- Chatham: That's right.
- Jim: Oh, that's nice. And did you join any veterans' organizations?
- Chatham: I joined the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, the Disabled American Vets, and the Flying Veterans Association.
- Jim: Oh, I don't know about that one.
- Chatham: That one there is—as a result of the injuries I received, I'm losing my sight, so that—
- Jim: You're losing it?
- Chatham: Yeah.
- Jim: Because of your injury? From smacking your head on that Korean turf?
- Chatham: Well, that along with the fact that there's still pieces of shrapnel inside of me.
- Jim: Where?

Chatham: Well, two years ago they just removed a piece the size of an orange out of my neck.

Jim: An orange! Well you could feel that!

Chatham: Yep, it was in the back of my neck here.

Jim: Jesus Christ!

Chatham: And when it started interfering with the movement on my neck, they decided to take it out.

Jim: Well that's should be fairly simple to take that out there, that's not very deep there.

Chatham: Nope.

Jim: My, my, my, my. And that was a piece of shrapnel?

Chatham: Mmm hmm. From 1950.

Jim: Right, well I've taken out a lot of shrapnel. So I'm very familiar with how that goes. That's one thing I did when I was in Korea. Okay and do you still have a piece left do you think?

Chatham: Yep.

Jim: Where's that?

Chatham: There's one piece in the skull.

Jim: In the bone?

Chatham: Yep.

Jim: Not in the brain?

Chatham: Nope.

Jim: Oh, well the hell with that then. [Chatham laughs] That will never bother you.

Chatham: It won't, huh?

- Jim: No, no. Well tell me how they figured you were losing your sight. Did they say in what way are you losing your sight?
- Chatham: There's been nerve damage that has affected—my peripheral vision was the first to go. But in the last year, my sight itself has gotten foggier and foggier.
- Jim: Are you on 100% disability?
- Chatham: Yes, I am.
- Jim: Yeah, I would imagine. And—what else did I want to ask you? You got the unit citation for your work in Germany. I suppose you weren't in Korea long enough to get any particular citation other than—
- Chatham: Other than Korean Service Medal, no.
- Jim: That's what I got, yeah. We got—our hospital shipped out citations plus additional stars if we were there so long. I spent a year there. Well, I just can't think of—what a story! That's really an outstanding experience, I would say. I'm sure you feel that you're extremely lucky to have made it.
- Chatham: Oh yeah, very definitely. Matter of fact, since I've gotten out, I've had two heart attacks which—within three months of each other—and had to be brought back to life during the second one.
- Jim: Oh my. Have you had a bypass?
- Chatham: No, not yet.
- Jim: They haven't recommended that yet?
- Chatham: Not yet. So far as it goes, they won't even do an MRI on me because of the amount of metal that they say is inside me. [Laughs]
- Jim: They afraid they'd light you up? Start to glow in the dark? [Laughs]
- Chatham: Yeah, something like that.
- Jim: No, what they're afraid of, if you don't know, is they don't want that piece of metal to move. Because an MRI is a big magnet, you see, that's the whole purpose of that. If you have metal in there, it can move that metal around very easily and I really don't think they want that metal to start moving around. You know, it doesn't cause you trouble now, but if it moves where they don't want it, you can go from a non-situation to big trouble.

Chatham: Right.

Jim: Well, I can't think of anything else to ask you. The story went along so fast and it's incredible. Have you done any flying since you got off?

Chatham: Just on commercial planes.

Jim: Commercials, right. And you don't miss your Air Force people?

Chatham: Oh yeah, I miss 'em.

Jim: Yeah, that was a nice group you were in, on both sides of Earth. Okay, that should do it. Thank you. I appreciate your help.

[End of Interview]