

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
CLAIRE MILLIREN  
Bombardier, Air Force, World War II.

2008

OH  
1227

OH  
1227

**Milliren, Claire**, (1922?- ). Oral History Interview, 2008.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound disc (ca. 45 min.), digital, 4 3/4 in.

Security Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract:**

Claire Milliren, an Arkansaw, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service as a bombardier in the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force. Milliren talks about his upbringing on a farm near Arkansaw and receiving a draft notice the day he enlisted in the Army Air Force. He speaks of basic training at Biloxi (Mississippi), cadet training at Santa Ana (California), gunnery school at Kingman (Arizona), and B-24 crew training in Pueblo (Colorado). In 1944, he tells of flying to Great Britain with his crew and nicknaming their airplane "Hull's Angels" after their pilot. Stationed in England, Milliren discusses relations between the British and Americans, visiting pubs, driving through the fog in London, and flying practice missions at night. He describes the troubles encountered on his first mission to Germany, flying through flak, and once having to land in France overnight. Milliren touches on the death of some cadets during a training accident in New Mexico. He comments on debriefings, using Norden bombsights, and corresponding by letter with his future wife. After the war, he addresses his homecoming, finishing college, and getting a job as an agricultural instructor in Owen (Wisconsin). Milliren mentions working twelve years as an instructor for a veteran farm training program, and he describes his involvement with the American Legion and the Owen-Withee Vets Club, including efforts to improve a local veterans' memorial. He discusses using radar to bomb targets in cloudy weather and flying his last two missions on the same day.

Interviewed by Robert Garrett, 2008

Transcribed by Robert Garrett, 2008

Transcription checked and corrected by WVM staff, 2011

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2012

**Interview Transcript:**

[WVM staff note: This interview contained a large amount of narrator and interviewer feedback words (i.e. sure, yeah, okay, uh-huh). These words cut up the interview and made it difficult to follow the flow of speech and informational intent of both narrator and interviewer. They were largely removed by the WVM staff member who checked and corrected this transcript.]

Robert: Today is Friday, November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2008, and I am interviewing Claire Milliren, who served with the U.S. Army's 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force unit during World War II. Claire, you just want to establish your voice for the microphone here and say—

Claire: Yeah, hi.

Robert: Okay. That's good. My name is Bob Garrett. I work as an archivist for the State of Michigan, but I grew up in Owen, Wisconsin, and we're conducting the interview here in Owen in Claire's house. And with me here is my father, Curt Garrett, and Dad served in the U.S. Navy from 1961 to 1966, and he's just sitting in on the interview. Do you want to say—

Curt: Hi.

Robert: Okay. And Dad and Claire are both active in the Owen-Withee Vets Club and the American Legion. Okay. We'll just get right out of this, [to] begin—do you want to just talk about growing up and where you're from, where you grew up?

Claire: Yeah, well, I was born and raised on a farm near Arkansaw, Wisconsin. It's about ninety miles from here. And, of course, I worked up on the farm through the time I was halfway through college, of course, milking cows, feeding the chickens, and doing all the other farm chores. And I liked the chickens especially because—so my job was to take care of the chickens. And my brother, he liked sheep, so he took care of the sheep. And I guess nobody likes to milk cows, but—

Robert: I never did.

Claire: Yeah, okay. And, of course, doing the field work of plowing, cultivating, making hay.

Robert: Okay, well, what do you sort of remember of the town itself or the community? Do you—

Claire: Well, both the town—it's a little town of about 200 people with—so mostly the community, you know, the other farmers in the area, you know.

Robert: Do you remember what—you grew up through the Depression? Is that kind of when you—

Claire: Yeah, right, yeah, yeah. We didn't really have it too hard on the farm because we always had plenty of meat, milk, and eggs. And, but anyway, it wasn't too bad. Well, one thing, my father had paid off the mortgage before the Depression hit. Oh yeah, he raised pigs too, and he got free buttermilk from the creamery and hauled it by horse and buggy, or horse and team, and fed those pigs on buttermilk. And they grew like heck.

Robert: Oh jeez.

Claire: And he made enough money from pigs that he was able to pay off the mortgage by 1929 when the Depression hit.

Robert: Oh, okay, that was good timing.

Claire: Yeah, yeah.

Robert: Okay. And I kind of read a little bit of your memoir here. It said that you were in college in '41 when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. What do you remember about that time?

Claire: Well, I remember I was in my room and I had the radio on. It came over the radio that the Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor and I thought, "Oh boy, we're in for it now." And, but I had more or less decided that I wanted to be in the Air Force. Well, I liked to take pictures of airplanes, and I was fascinated by airplanes. And so I decided I didn't want to be down on the ground in the mud and the dirt. I wanted to be up there in the sky.

Robert: Okay, that makes sense, yeah. Yeah, I know the Air Force was part of the Army at that time.

Claire: Yeah, Army Air Force, right.

Robert: How did that work? Did you sign up for the Army, and you could request the Air Force, or—

Claire: Well, you signed up for the Army Air Force. And, well, I signed up in the fall of 1942, and then they said—well, after I got sworn in, finally, because you didn't get sworn in right away—and they said, "Well, we'll call you in three to six months." Well, it was six months and so that went into March and [I] finally got called up then.

- Robert: Okay, was it kind of typical to wait that long?
- Claire: Yeah, all the way—because, you know, they just didn't have the training bases ready, you know. This had all come at once, you know, and you had to wait because they didn't have the facilities ready for use.
- Robert: Sure, okay, that makes sense. And you got called over there—and I remember it sounds to me like, oh yeah, I remember I read that. You went down to Green Bay for awhile and then they didn't—
- Claire: Yeah, yeah.
- Robert: Can you talk about that a little bit and—
- Claire: Well, yeah, like I said, I signed up and then they had a traveling team that went around the state. And the next place they were going to be was in Green Bay and so I hopped a bus from Arkansaw, and all the way over to Green Bay, and got there, and the guy said, "Do you have your release from the Draft Board?" I said, "No, I didn't know I had to have it." "Well, you have to have it." So back on the bus I went and back home. Well, the next place they were going to be was down at Wisconsin Rapids. Well, I'd started back to college then in September, and I called up my dad one day, and I says, "Will you come and get me and take me down to Wisconsin Rapids on such-and-such a date?" And he did, and I got sworn in, and that night when we got back, here was a letter in the mail from the Draft Board saying, "You're being drafted." I called them up and said, "No, I'm in the Air Force."
- Robert: Well, eventually you got it all straightened out, anyway. Yeah, what do you remember about boot camp, or what was the training like?
- Claire: Well, like I say, I went down to Biloxi, Mississippi; went down on the train to Chicago, which was the first time I ever rode on a train. Got down to Chicago, where we were to be, and rode in a taxi; the first time I ever rode in a taxi. And then, the next day, we took a troop train from Chicago down to Biloxi, Mississippi. And, well, the boot camp, of course, it was all new and [there] was a lot of marching, a lot of walking. Pretty soon I had sore feet, and I went to the—whoever it is that takes care of clothing, and I says, "I got to have some different shoes or I won't be able to walk at all." So I got a new pair of shoes. And another guy that I always remembered from boot camp—[he] was some guy there—I think he was a sergeant, a drill sergeant, you know, and he was always trying to sell sunglasses. He says, "You know, down in this hot sun, if you don't get these sunglasses, you're going to go blind." So, luckily, I never bought any.

- Robert: Oh, you didn't go blind.
- Claire: No.
- Robert: I said what kind of—you were a bombardier, I gather—
- Claire: Yeah.
- Robert: Can you describe how you got that job and what sort of training you went through?
- Claire: Well, of course, I enlisted for it. You could be a pilot, or bombardier, or navigator, and these were all commissioned positions. So well, I couldn't be a pilot because I was two inches too short. And so I said, "Well. I didn't know about navigation either, so I'm going to be a bombardier." So that's what I signed up for.
- Robert: Had you ever been in an airplane before you went on the—you said you were always kind of fascinated by them, but I was just kind of curious.
- Claire: Just maybe once or twice when it was going up. There wasn't that many planes around, you know, but I was still fascinated by them.
- Robert: Sure. And I was curious, some of the training you went through, like you said, you were assembling and disassembling machine guns while blindfolded.
- Claire: Yeah well, that was part of the—after you got—see, we went to cadet training out in Santa Ana, California and, after cadet training, you had to go through gunnery school. I went through gunnery school at Kingman, Arizona. And, you know, you flew in a B-17 and fired at TOE targets and the like.
- Robert: Okay, how long did it take you to learn how to assemble and disassemble a machine gun blindfolded?
- Claire: Oh, I just don't remember how long it took, but I was able to do it.
- Robert: Okay, yeah, that just kind of stuck out to me because I was trying to picture myself trying to do that and I don't know—Okay, and then you eventually—well, you did get into Europe and—when did you leave here. I think you had the—
- Claire: Well I left—

- Robert: July of '44?
- Claire: Yeah, Sunday, July 16<sup>th</sup>. Well see, before that we went through B-24 crew training, out in Pueblo, Colorado, after I got through with bombardier training. Well, then I went to Lincoln, Nebraska, and then we were transferred to Pueblo, Colorado where they had a B-24 training base. And that was the first time I'd met all the people that were on the crew here.
- Robert: Right and you have then all listed here. And you were on a B-24. B-17 was a flying fortress?
- Claire: Yeah.
- Robert: B-24 was a liberator?
- Claire: Liberator, right.
- Robert: What was the difference? Was the B-24 a little lighter, or what was the—
- Claire: No, it was a little heavier, actually, but it had a longer range and could fly faster than a B-17. Yeah, we always used to say, "Well, the B-17s got all the glory and the B-24s did all the work.
- Robert: You flew all the way to England on the B-24, then?
- Claire: Yeah, right.
- Robert: What was that trip—kind of like what were your thoughts on that when you finally—
- Claire: Well, I've got it in here. We went from Lincoln, Nebraska up to Bangor, Maine, no, actually, Manchester. We were supposed to go to Bangor and then they changed us over to Manchester, New Hampshire. And then we went to Goose Bay, Labrador, and it was a five-hour flight of 900 miles. And then we had to wait there a day because the weather was bad, and we finally got up and flew over to—actually to Scotland is where we landed, but we landed, you know, you didn't make the flights all in one day then. So we flew to, like I say, we were supposed to go to Valley, Wales, but we found out we were over Northern Ireland, and then we picked up the radio beam and flew into Valley, Wales. And then they said they had to shoot up green flares to show where the runway was because it was so foggy, which was the way it was over in England; most the time it was foggy.
- Robert: What was kind of going through your head when you were taking off? Were you excited, kind of anxious, kind of knew when you were heading over there—

- Claire: Well, I would say probably both excited and anxious, you know, probably more so on landing.
- Robert: Right, I mean you had a number of people on there. Was everybody just sort of talking about the whole thing or what?
- Claire: Well, yeah.
- Robert: What was the kind of conversation?
- Claire: I don't know if you, you know, I've got this picture of the B-24.
- Robert: Oh, okay. Hull's Angels.
- Claire: Yeah, and this is actually a drawing. It's not an actual picture. One of the crew members—in fact, it was this guy here that drew that picture, and I've got a list of all the crew members. There was ten, you know, on the—You had the pilot, co-pilot, bombardier, navigator. Here's the—he was the rear gunner. This was the side gunner. This man was the radio operator. This guy was the belly turret. This guy was the engineer, and this guy was another gunner. Yeah, so it would be a pretty full crew.
- Robert: So it would be a pretty full crew; ten. Okay. Hull's Angels, that would be after—there wouldn't been a movie at that time, not yet.
- Claire: Yeah, there was Hell's Angels. I mean the pilot, his name—
- Robert: Hell's Angels was a movie, right.
- Claire: His name was Hull.
- Robert: Right, okay, Henry Hull.
- Claire: And so we decided to name it Hull's Angels.
- Robert: Okay, right, after the Howard Hughes movie, I think. Right?
- Claire: Yeah.
- Robert: Was it at that time?
- Claire: Yeah, yeah.
- Robert: Yeah, okay, and the one I had there—and you said you landed in Wales, but you were stationed in England, right?



- Claire: Well, yeah.
- Robert: For a little bit of time?
- Claire: We was [in] England all the time, yeah, yeah.
- Robert: What was your impression of the English over there? How do you think they viewed the Americans?
- Claire: Well, they liked the Americans all right, except for one thing. They said they were overpaid, oversexed, and over here.
- Robert: I guess that sums up a pretty good attitude, but they got along with everybody most of the time?
- Claire: Oh, yeah.
- Robert: Pretty well okay?
- Claire: Yeah, yeah, yeah, we'd go out to the pubs every once in a while and host a few and visit, you know. It was interesting and—
- Robert: I think you had a comment here about being in a pub in England. You said, oh yeah, right here. You said the beer was flat.
- Claire: Yeah.
- Robert: Okay, let's see, what sort of things did you do in your down time? I noticed it looks like you watched a lot of movies and—
- Claire: Yeah, movies and, well, going out to the pubs, or once in a while we'd get off for a weekend pass, you know, and go down to London, and so it was all right except, I mean, it was foggy a lot. I mean, see, in London it would get so foggy, you couldn't see either side of the street. You had to walk right down the middle of the street. And I can remember one time going into, well, just a local pub that you couldn't see anything. Well anyway, a bunch got together with a Jeep and the only way we could go was to have somebody walk in front of the Jeep so he could look down and see the yellow line, or white line, or whatever it was, in the middle there.
- Robert: Okay, little precarious or a little—
- Claire: Yeah.

- Robert: Yeah, okay, and it looks like you had some time before your first mission or there was a lot of—
- Claire: Yeah well, we had a lot of practice missions, you know. We were [doing practice missions] both night and day. Well, when we were not doing anything, they had us flying practice missions. And so well then for quite a while, we were on night practice. O course, normally we didn't do any night flying, but they had us, what they call, "stood down" to fly night practice missions. They didn't tell us what it was for. And we didn't know. Well, I don't know. It went on for some time and, all of a sudden, it quit so we had no idea, to this day, what it was for, but there must have been some special night mission they were training us for. But, anyway, it must have been canceled so—
- Curt G: You never flew it?
- Robert: Never happened?
- Claire: No, yeah.
- Robert: Well that's interesting. Okay then your first mission was—
- Claire: August 24, Thursday.
- Robert: Okay, there we go. Yeah, it seemed like you were spending a lot of time kind of getting ready for the mission.
- Claire: Yeah, yeah.
- Robert: And then once you started going on missions, you did lot of them.
- Claire: Yeah, yeah, yeah, as long as the weather held out, yeah, yeah. That first mission was the scariest, of course. You know, the first one you don't know what you are going to run into, you know, so it's scary. And then, of course, everything that happened there, the engines lost their turbos, and we couldn't keep up. We had to fall back to the ones behind us, and then when we finally get to the target, the damn bombs wouldn't release so the engineer had to get back on the catwalk, which run through the bomb bay. It was real narrow, about a food wide. It was narrow, and he had to kick out each bomb individually.
- Robert: Jeez, this was the first mission?
- Claire: First one. And we didn't know if we were going to get back okay or not. Fortunately, we had, of course, the P-51s flew escort. By the time we got over there, they would escort us all the way and back, if necessary, so we

never had any trouble with the fighters. It was just the anti-aircraft flaks, you know, it would be so black at times, it looked like you could get out and walk on it.

Robert: Wow. All the flak, yeah. Did you get hit with the flak sometimes?

Claire: Well, yeah, we got hit a couple times; nothing serious. One hit the—see, we wore the flak helmets, you know, and one hit the navigator in the helmet, but it didn't go through or anything. And another one just missed the tail gunner by inches, you know. Otherwise, we didn't have any trouble.

Robert: But there were a couple of hairy moments here and there it sounds like.

Claire: Yeah, yeah, and other time after, I think it was on my twenty-first mission. Well, I had been reassigned to a lead, you know, you had about eight or ten planes in a group, and you flew in that group. And, but anyway, for some reason after—we, it would have been after twenty missions, yeah twenty missions, I was assigned to a lead group. In each group you had a leader and so, anyway, I was assigned to that plane and flew what we'd call a pilotage navigating. You got up in the front turret, the one way in the front, and looked out and confirmed the navigator's location if it was visual, you know. A lot of times it wasn't visual. Anyway, on that twenty-first mission, we had a little trouble. Like I say, it was dense contrails and cold as hell. Anyway, we were short of gas due to the failure of the transfer pump. We had plenty of gas, but, you see, you had two different tanks and when the first one, the main tank, got low, they'd press a button or whatever and transfer from the auxiliary tank into the main tank. Well, the pump didn't work so we had to land over in France and stayed overnight there until they got it fixed and then came back the next day. Well, this guy, Anderson, was the pilot of that plane and he was sort of a daredevil as compared to the one on the original crew. [Claire Milliren reviewed the transcript and clarified that Anderson was the pilot of a B-24 airplane.] And so when we were flying back, he got down to, I would say, twenty or thirty feet above the ground with a B-24. Well, we pulled up over trees at the end of fields. Well, yeah, I was scared as hell because if anything would have happened, then we wouldn't have had a chance, you know. But anyway, we made it back to England.

Robert: Okay, well, that's good. Well, maybe a little—did you lose any friends, that you knew, or did you lose anybody on any mission, or—

Claire: No, no, I never lost anybody. I'd say I had more—well, we were cadets then down in Deming, New Mexico when I was going through bombardier training. We had two planes that crashed; run together, I guess. See, we did both night practice and day practice, and this was a night practice, and

I don't know what happened, but the two of them run together, and both planes went down, and everybody was killed. There was—you have the pilot and three cadets and you'd have one on the bombsight, another one getting ready, and another one taking pictures. You had to take a picture of every bomb that was dropped in practice, and then you were scored on them. And so, anyway, I say, on one of these particular missions, like I say, these two planes flew together, and into each other, and both went down. They don't know what happened. He flew right into the ground. So I think they lost about three, no, it was six or eight there in cadet training. But every, well I guess, everybody was probably pretty well trained by the time you got out of there, but yeah, yeah.

Robert: Yeah, okay, did you ever worry that maybe you wouldn't get back alive or—

Claire: Oh yeah, every time. Yeah, you never know when one of those pieces of flak were going to hit you, you know, square and knock the plane out of commission entirely, you know, and so it was, like I say, every one was scary.

Robert: Right, did you just, I mean, how did you learn to cope with that? Did you just sort of—you just got used to it, or—

Claire: Well yeah, I guess you get used to it. Then of course, the first thing you did, when you got back, you went through was they call debriefing. They ask you different questions about how everything went, you know, and then, of course, you're in the room, and they offered everybody a shot of brandy, so [that] kind of settled our nerves.

Robert: Sure, sure, yeah, I imagine that would be welcome a lot of times, sure. Okay, and how well—well I mean, you're up in the plane, up in the air. You were dropping planes [bombs]. Could you, kind of, see down from where you were in the plane when you were dropping—

Claire: Oh yeah, yeah, if it was clear, I mean, see, we bombed from 20,000 feet, but, I mean, you could see pretty well, yeah.

Robert: Did you, I mean, how did you sight the target on these things, or--

Claire: Well see, we had the Norden Bombsight. I don't know if you ever heard of it, but that was the famous bombsight. In fact, they said, well, if we were ever shot down, we were supposed to destroy it. But anyway, I'd say, well, you had to be ambidextrous. You had to use both hands. One would correct course and the other would correct, let's see, up and down. And so, anyway, you had to use both hands, and you had the cross-hairs in there. Normally, those cross-hairs would look like they're moving, you

know, but you had to get it so those cross-hairs stood still. And then you knew you were on your target. See, it was all—the bombs were dropped automatically through the bombsight. In other words, when we got to what we called the “IP,” which is the initial point, where you started the bomb run, and so from there on, the bombardier controlled the plane with the Norden Bombsight. In other words, when you turned that, it turned the plane, yeah.

Robert: Oh, Okay, so you were basically piloting at that point?

Claire: We were piloting the train through the automatic pilot. Yeah.

Robert: And could you see, because I noticed, I saw something that you were bombing like the oil refineries and stuff.

Claire: Yeah.

Robert: You could tell from up there? You could see clearly it was an oil refinery or—

Claire: Oh yeah, yeah.

Robert: Obviously you must have. I just, but I just—Okay, and could you see—I mean, could you see down there on the ground; Germany? You must, I mean, went through a lot of destruction there towards the end.

Claire: Oh yeah.

Robert: Could you see—

Claire: Yeah, yeah, there was a lot of bombed out places there, yeah.

Robert: Yeah, so you were aware of that. Okay, and I think you were writing to your future wife, I think, at the time, or you met her just before?

Claire: Yeah, yeah, well see, when we were in Pueblo, Colorado for crew training, I met this girl, and we started going together a few times. Of course, we were only there like, what, eight weeks; something like that. So I said, “Well, be sure to write to me.” Well, she did and so we corresponded back and forth all the time I was over in England. And then of course, after the war ended in Europe, well, [I] came back and was reassigned out to Santa Ana, California, and then, from there, to Texas for further rehearsal or renewal of bombardier training. Well, of course, the war ended there in—was it August? Yeah; August '45, yeah. And so then, of course, I was discharged and, well, when I was on my way out of Santa Ana, California, I stopped by Pueblo, Colorado and saw my

girlfriend and asked her if she would marry me. And so then, of course, we were married then; January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1946, after the war.

Robert: And what do you remember about when the war ended when you went—

Claire: Well, it was a good feeling.

Robert: Yeah, I'm sure.

Claire: Yeah, yeah, and, of course, I went right back to school. I had almost, well I guess, I did have three years in, and so--in fact, I had a little less because I'd gone to some summer schools—and so I still had one summer school to go to after I officially graduated and came up here to Owen and applied for a job here, and I got the job. See, I was an ag instructor and got the job as an ag instructor here in Owen for my first job. Yeah, and been around here ever since.

Robert: Okay, okay, great. I said I was looking through your diary, and I had one—there was one—you were commenting about censoring mail, which I thought was sort of interesting because, I mean, I knew they'd done that, but I don't—I never talked to anybody who's done that before. What sort of—

Claire: Well, like I say, it was kind of monotonous and kind of—I don't know what you call it—reading all the mushy letters.

Robert: Right, there were a couple of those, yeah.

Claire: Yeah.

Robert: So, I don't know, does anything stick out, or what sort of stuff did you—

Claire: No, not really, no.

Robert: Is there anything you had to censor a lot?

Claire: Well, yeah, there'd be once in a while, but not too much from England. I think from other countries, they probably had to do more censoring than from England because we were there, you know. As long as you didn't write about bombing missions or anything like that, you know.

Robert: Yeah, too bad. Okay, what do I have here? Oh yeah, what was—well you mentioned—I mean, you got home and got married, but did everything change a lot at the end of the war, or what sort of impressions did you—

- Claire: Well, yeah, it was different. In other words, I mean, they didn't have any big receptions or parades or anything like that. We just got out and we were out. And you went back to school or back to work. Well, that was it.
- Robert: Yeah, and so it was just—in a way, it was just sort of strange that everything was kind of like—
- Claire: Yeah, so I got discharged at Camp McCoy here, down in Wisconsin here, and went on home or, I guess, I had my dad come and get me down there, and back home I went. And then, like I said, well, before that, well, I had planned to return to college, but since I didn't get out in time to start in September, I had to wait till after Thanksgiving. In the meantime, they needed a math and science teacher at my old high school in Arkansas, Wisconsin, and so they asked me if I would; they needed a teacher. They asked me if I'd come and teach. "Well," I says, "I'm going back to school after Thanksgiving." "Well, that's okay. We need a teacher, now." So I got paid for teaching, and I was still getting my terminal leave, and so I was making money hand over fist.
- Robert: Gee, okay, okay, and you were the ag instructor here in Owen for quite a long time. You had the same job.
- Claire: Well actually, I was just the high school ag instructor for two years, and then I switched over to—they had the veterans farm training program that had just started, and so I decided to switch. It was through the school. It was a program that was run through the school and in the school, but not, you know, mostly at night. You had your night classes, and then you visited the people that were farming on their farms there twice a month. And so I did that for twelve years until that program ran out for the World War II and the Korean veterans.
- Robert: Okay. Oh yeah, I made a couple notes, and I was going through your journal here. You had one on December 24, 1944. There was something, yeah, you wrote something here about [you] had an old—I'm not sure if I read it right—[you] had an old World War I plane?
- Claire: Oh no, I think maybe there's a—maybe a—let's see—where is that? Well, yeah, see, yeah. I know that's something about I—it wasn't a World War I [plane], but it was an old beat up plane. And then for the second mission, we got on a new plane, so that worked better.
- Robert: Okay well, the way it was written, you said you had the war, 'W,' and then you penciled something in, and I wasn't sure if it was World War I or—

Claire: It's still World War II, but, yeah.

Robert: Well, we wouldn't have—well, while we pointed that out there, how did you celebrate Christmas at that time. Do you remember because your journal, you kind of go from September 24<sup>th</sup>, you had a mission, you were right back out on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

Claire: Well, you really didn't do much celebrating.

Robert: No, I suppose not.

Claire: No, no.

Robert: Did you have a big meal, anyway, or you just kind of—

Claire: Oh, I'm sure we did. I just don't remember.

Robert: Okay, okay, that's fine. I just was curious and I thought I would point that out. And I think on the end of that, I see you've been active in a number of veteran's organizations since the war.

Claire: Yeah, yeah.

Robert: The American Legion?

Claire: Yeah, yeah, I've been a member for sixty-three years in the American Legion, well, ever since they got to town here; I joined right away and so I got sixty-three years in on that.

Robert: Okay, and then you've been in the Owen-Withee Vets Club since that was started, okay?

Claire: Yeah.

Robert: And did you have any thoughts you wanted to say about veterans organizations, or just your activities in them, or—

Claire: Well I mean, I've enjoyed both of them. The Legion went downhill for a number of reasons and I, of course, I had started with the Vets Club anyway, but we still kept the legion going. It's not as active as, you know, as it used to be sixteen years ago or, so anyway, I've enjoyed both of them. And then, this year, well, I had the pleasure of working on the veterans memorial down at the Veterans park and getting that redone, and so it was my—[I] felt it [was] my job to be the head guy on that, so I had to keep that going, and get it built, and tell everybody what to do. And of



course, Curt [Curt Garrett, the interviewer's father] nominated me for this unsung hero's award.

Curt: Channel 13.

Robert: Channel 13? Sure, yeah, I saw the *OW Enterprise* write up on that.

Claire: Yeah, yeah, it's been on TV several times since that once, or they would just show excerpts of it every once in a while. I see they got some Vietnam War veteran on there now.

Curt: I haven't seen that one.

Claire: I just saw it; six o'clock every Wednesday—

Curt: Fourth, fourth Wednesday.

Claire: Fourth Wednesday of the month, they had a new one, a new one that they're honoring, yeah.

Robert: Sure, that's great. Well, now I remember I wrote this one, too. You had a comment in the journal at one point. You wrote, "Bombed by GH through 10-10 clouds," and I guess I don't know what that means.

Claire: Yeah well, it's a type of radar. There were several different types of radar. I don't know what they stood for, but if it was completely cloudy and you couldn't, of course, see the ground or anything, and so if it was kind of a general target--maybe a town or a big plant, some big plant of some kind that covered quite an area—they'd bomb it. But, I mean, if you had some targets that you had to be visual on, then you wouldn't use the radar. It's just when it was 10-10, that means it's completely cloudy. You can't see anything, that what that is.

Robert: So bombed by radar through the—okay. So basically you had to go through the radar because you couldn't see—

Claire: Yeah well actually, the radar radio operator actually dropped the bombs. Or no, well, he actually—no. He told me as bombardier, "Okay, drop," you know. But, I mean, he had on the radar—he had a—and then he would call me on the interphone and say, "Drop," you know.

Robert: Well, I have to say looking through this, it's just like one mission right after the other.

Claire: Yeah.

- Robert: That would be wearying to me, I think, anyway. Did you get kind of really—
- Claire: Well, you had to—liked to get done, and so, see that well, the last two missions, I flew in the same day; number twenty-nine and number thirty. So the first one was early in the morning; takeoff at 6:30. We were bombing an airfield in Germany and led the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, visual bombing; good results, and returned at 1200. It would be at noon. And then they asked us if we wanted to fly another mission because we still had time to make another one. Well, I says, “It’s all right with me because it’s going to be my last one.”
- Robert: Right, yeah, okay, so that would work. When you got thirty, you had enough points to—okay, so then that’s how they—
- Claire: Well, they just went by the number of missions.
- Robert: Sure, okay, I see, okay, yeah, I understand. I was just wondering if that ever got to you sometimes, just kind of go-go-go-go-go, and just going.
- Claire: Yeah well, not really, no—just wanted to get it over with; get them done.
- Robert: Yeah, yeah, I can understand that. Okay, I think that’s all I have. Is there anything else, anything you’d like to say or anything you’d like to point out?
- Claire: No, no, I guess that’s about all; pretty well covered it.
- Robert: Do you have any questions?
- Curt: No.
- Claire: We’re done then.
- Robert: I’ll guess we’ll sign up, yep.

**[End of Interview]**