

## **Transcription: Jim Wellman**

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*Good afternoon. Today is Monday, March 24, 2013. My name is James Crabtree. This afternoon I'll be interviewing Mr. Jim Wellman. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to let us interview you today. It's an honor for our program.*

**Jim Wellman:** Glad to be here.

*Yes sir. Sir, the first question that we always start with is please tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went into the military.*

**Jim Wellman:** Well, I was born in 1925, eight years after World War I. So growing up I, you know, airplanes fascinated me, so I started collecting pictures of airplanes and everything like that I could. And never knowing or dreaming that I would be in World War II. So anyway, when I got ready to . . . Got to 17 I was ready to enlist. I didn't want to be a foot soldier so I . . . And naturally I liked airplanes so I went down and enlisted in the Army Air Corps.

*And where was this? Where was home for you?*

**Jim Wellman:** Oklahoma City.

*Oklahoma City. So where were you then when Pearl Harbor was bombed? Were you still in high school when the war started?*

**Jim Wellman:** Yes, uh-huh, I was in high school. I think a junior in high school.

*Tell us, sir, what your memories were of that. Did you think at that point that you'd be going to war when you finished high school?*

**Jim Wellman:** Well, I knew I was close enough to be drafted if the war lasted long enough. I had already made up my mind what branch of service I'd like to get into.

*So the Army Air Corps was what you wanted to do.*

**Jim Wellman:** Right. And I wanted to be an Air Cadet. Hotshot pilot, you know.

*So tell us then. You enlisted when you were 17 or did you wait until you turned 18?*

**Jim Wellman:** I enlisted in September of '43 and I left for the service in December.

*Did you have to have your parents' permission to sign up?*

**Jim Wellman:** No. They knew I was going to have to go anyway and I wouldn't go until after I was 18, so they didn't have any . . . 'Course they didn't want me to go, but you know, they didn't make any waves about it.

*Did you have any siblings that were in the military or were you the only one?*

**Jim Wellman:** I have a son is in Vietnam.

*But did you have any brothers?*

**Jim Wellman:** No, no brothers. Just one sister.

*So when you went off to war, you were the one boy going away.*

**Jim Wellman:** That was a namesake.

*Yeah. So you wanted to go into the Army Air Corps and you were able to get into the Army Air Corps. Is that because you signed up or was it just random luck?*

**Jim Wellman:** No, I signed up and they wouldn't accept because I was underweight. Had to be 140 and I weighed 138. So the guy that signed me up said, "Tell you what you do. You go out and eat bananas and drink milk and then come back." And I came back and I weighed 141.

*How long did you wait from that advice to the weigh-in? Was it a couple of days?*

**Jim Wellman:** No, it was the same day. I just went out and did it and came back and talked to him again. He weighed me again and so . . . Anyway, like I say, I wanted to be an Air Cadet, so I went to Fort Sill and didn't get a uniform but they took and gave me all of my shots. They had kind of a barracks deal. You know, doorways. Every time you go through a doorway they'd hit you with a shot on each side.

*I'm familiar with that.*

**Jim Wellman:** Then they sent us out to play baseball. Sore arms and all. So then I went to Sheppard Field where I took basic training.

*That's in Wichita Falls?*

**Jim Wellman:** Yes. And found out after I got down there that they didn't need any more pilots. So I became a career gunner, they called it.

*All right. Tell us about that. What that training was like.*

**Jim Wellman:** Well, it was just mostly marching and hiking and guard duty. Things like that.

*Did you enjoy it or were you ready to see . . . ?*

**Jim Wellman:** I was having a good time.

*You were.*

**Jim Wellman:** I was pretty regimented at home anyway so I didn't change much there.

*What were most of the men like that were in your platoon in basic training? Were they from all over the country? Were they young? Older?*

**Jim Wellman:** Pretty much all over the country. Got a story about John Agar. Did you ever hear about John Agar?

*I have. Tell us.*

**Jim Wellman:** Well, he was in the same barracks I was and he kept talking about dating Shirley Temple. So we thought, you know, “No way.” But we found out later he married her. So anyway, we kind of ate our own tongue that way, you know.

*Kind of a small world, I guess, at that point.*

**Jim Wellman:** Oh yeah. 'Course he was from California. I don't know how he got to Sheppard Field, but he did. I don't remember a whole lot about personal guys except for him. But when they said we weren't going to be pilots, we're going to be career gunners, they sent us to Laredo, Texas to gunnery school. And so we were there, I don't know, about three months. I think I made PFC there. One thing I remember there is in the training they had us shoot skeet. I made a perfect score on skeet. I think it was 25 shots and 15 were singles and 5 of 'em are doubles, and I hit 'em all.

*So you were well picked then.*

**Jim Wellman:** Well, you know, I was familiar with guns. When I was growing up, my dad, first time I ever remember shooting a gun. He had a shotgun and we were on five acres and we had two trees that had a board across 'em, you know. So we saw a rabbit out there in the field across the fence. And he said, “Okay, Jim, put your gun on that and rest it on that and get the bead on that rabbit and then pull the trigger.” He didn't tell me anything else. I found out next, next time I ended on my backside. My shoulder was sore. But I did quite a bit of rabbit huntin'. Mother wouldn't let me kill squirrels. She liked squirrels. I shot at crows and stuff like that.

*So gunnery came pretty easy to you.*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, and I enjoyed it 'cause . . . 'Course we had turrets that we popped right at and had BB guns, you know, and we'd shoot at planes. Had a stage kind of thing there. So . . .

*What type of weapon did you fire eventually when you became a gunner aboard a plane?*

**Jim Wellman:** 50 caliber.

*Fifty cal. Did you enjoy that? Did you like the 50 cal?*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, I liked it all right. And we had to, in our training, we had to, blindfolded, we had to disassemble the gun and put it back together blindfolded. Went across into Mexico while we were there.

*That's not hard to do from Laredo.*

**Jim Wellman:** 'Course everybody does. You know it's right on the border, Laredo is. But then we had to go to what they called transition. And that was in Lincoln, Nebraska. So we went up there to be put on a crew, and as it turned out, they didn't have enough to make a full crew. So they sent us to transition in Tucson, Arizona. Davis-Monthan Field.

*That Air Force Base is still there.*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, and it's still got a lot of B-24s on it. Stored.

*That's right, because of the desert environment. It's a big mothball base. It's a huge, huge thing there.*

**Jim Wellman:** But there they made me a nose gunner. I enjoyed that. While we were there our navigator got us lost down by Nogales. He came up and sat on the flight deck and the pilot tried to get him on the radio, and he said, "Where's Mifflin?" We said, "He's sitting on the flight deck." He said, "He didn't give me a heading to go back to base." So we flew around for a while and thought we was going to have to bail out, but we found a B-25 field. A little small, but we made it in there all right. And our pilot and navigator got in big trouble.

*So by the time you were at Davis-Monthan then, you were assigned to a crew to train with that you would eventually deploy with?*

**Jim Wellman:** That's what the purpose was there. To join a crew and . . . We trained together about three months.

*How many men were in the crew?*

**Jim Wellman:** Ten.

*Ten-man crew. Okay. So you had the pilot, co-pilot, navigator . . .*

**Jim Wellman:** Bombardier . . .

*Bombardier.*

**Jim Wellman:** Nose gunner, top turret gunner, two waist gunners, and a tail gunner.

*A tail gunner. And you were . . .*

**Jim Wellman:** Nose gunner.

*Nose gunner?*

**Jim Wellman:** First one there and the first one to leave.

*What type of plane were you flying?*

**Jim Wellman:** B-24. Liberator.

*B-24.*

**Jim Wellman:** This is it right here.

*Yes sir. Very famous bomber.*

**Jim Wellman:** Actually the B-17's kind of the darling of the Air Force, you know. Of course they had it a lot harder than we did before we got over there, but actually the B-24 carried more bombs and went farther distance. That's what they built it for. We always said they built the bomb bay and then they built the plane around it.

*Built it around it. That's right. So that ten-man crew that you trained with, did you all go together, or did the navigator get fired?*

**Jim Wellman:** No. We were together most of the war. I think after the war was over, we got another bombardier when we flew back to the States.

*So that was kind of a one-time mistake then, I guess, by the navigator over the deserts of Arizona?*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah. And so I can still name all the members of my crew and I was only with them like six or eight months, something like that.

*Most of them, were they all pretty young? Were they close in age to you?*

**Jim Wellman:** Oh yeah. There were some probably in their 20s, but most of us were . . . That was another story. They told us if we were corporals when we went over there and they said, "Okay now, they'll make you sergeants before you fly a mission because the Germans treat the sergeants up better than they do the noncoms and below." I flew every mission as a corporal.

*So that was kind of an urban legend then, that they would promote you before you flew.*

**Jim Wellman:** That's right. So anyway, we left Tucson and I got a, I think, a furlough then, and then they sent us to Topeka, Kansas, to get ready to embark. And we went to, by train, we went to Newport News, Virginia. We got on a French liner called Columbia that they'd made a troop ship out of it. So we were on the water for about two weeks and got to Naples. One thing about that trip was that we were having a ball, you know. The Air Force guys were having a ball but the infantry guys were all seasick, you know. Spent most of their time in their bunks. But anyway, we got to Naples and got off in Naples, walked down the pier, and got on an English ship. I don't remember the name of it, but the main thing I remember about it, it was filthy and the French liner was pretty nice. And we went around the boot to Gioia, and embarked there, and spent the night there. And the next day we went up to Minosa, Italy. That's where our air base was.

*So that's where you got your plane then?*

**Jim Wellman:** Right. And we didn't have a plane, really.

*You rotated?*

**Jim Wellman:** By that time, you know, they just assigned us a plane for each mission.

*Yeah. So the ten-man crew would stay together, but you would always have a different plane. It wasn't like the Memphis Belle or some other famous stories where they always flew the same plan.*

**Jim Wellman:** You know about the one in the desert that was flying back from Italy . . . Where they were stationed in Italy and they were flying back from bombing in Italy. And it got a dust storm and they missed their base and went on into the desert. I'm trying to think of the name of that plane but I can't think of it.

*Across the Mediterranean and missed it?*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah. And he was supposed to be going to Oran, Africa, and he overflowed it and they finally ran out of gas and lost the plane. Well, they belly landed it and they all got out, but there wasn't any place to go, you know, in the middle of the desert. So, I think they found some of those bodies, all except two of 'em. Lady Be Good, I think is what it was. Something like that.

*So but the planes that you would fly, every mission was a different plane? So you didn't have any nose art or any particular name for your planes?*

**Jim Wellman:** Didn't do that. Some of 'em had names on 'em, but we usually went by the tail number. Flying J or Flying M, or something like that.

*Tell us, sir, what it was like the first time you flew a mission in the war.*

**Jim Wellman:** Well, it was exciting. We went to Linz, Austria. We had to have 25 missions, but in order to get a mission you had to drop your bombs.

*Okay.*

**Jim Wellman:** So it was closed in when we got to Linz, Austria, and so in order to get credit for the mission we flew south to Salzburg and dropped our bombs there. They were all saying we were chickens down there. Got bombed. But then when I got back, you know, I got colds when I was out there. Sixty below. Minus 60, yeah. When I got back my bottom was pretty good, my feet were, but the upper wasn't. So I couldn't figure out why, so I said I have to tell 'em about that. So I undid my suit and I didn't plug it in.

*For the heat, right? Plug in the heat.*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah. We had, you know, heated gloves and heated boots and a heated uniform. And then a fleece-lined jackets and pants and boots over that.

*Because the bomber itself wasn't pressurized, obviously.*

**Jim Wellman:** No, they didn't pressurize any of them back then.

*So you had to wear an oxygen mask. And then did you have some sort of earpiece of something to communicate with the pilot and the rest of the crew?*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, we had earphones and a voice deal around our throat where they hear our voice.

*When you flew that first mission, were you nervous, excited?*

**Jim Wellman:** I was excited, yeah. Yeah. And it wasn't like the rest of the missions 'cause since we didn't get to go over Linz, Austria, no flak or anti-aircraft guns, so, but with the rest of the missions we had that. About the only thing we had to watch out for. By the time I got over there, the B-24s had bombed Romania's Ploiești oil fields.

*Yeah, very famous oil fields.*

**Jim Wellman:** And so Germans were running out of gas, and so about the only planes that they flew was for . . . You know, it was just a single airplane on a mission.

*So you didn't have to worry about German fighters as much at that point.*

**Jim Wellman:** No. They didn't attack any of these bombers anymore.

*Did you still have fighter escorts that flew with you though?*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, that's another story.

*What type of planes would fly with you? Mainly the Mustangs?*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, the P-51s. I think they had others but the problem was that they wouldn't come in very close, you know, give us very close support because some of these gunners would shoot at our own planes. Evidently they didn't learn anything in aircraft recognition.

*That's not good.*

**Jim Wellman:** Right. So we had some Red Tail P-51s that flew pretty good. Good cover, you know. And to and from the target. 'Course he wouldn't go over the target. So I found out later when I saw the movie Tuskegee Airmen, that that's the ones giving us the support. So I tried to contact one after I saw that movie and I got on the Internet but I couldn't locate any of them that were alive. So one of 'em came to Waco. I saw an article in the paper about one coming to Waco, so I told my wife, I said, "I'd sure like to go down and meet him. I'd like to thank him for his service." So she said, "Well, go on." So I did. I went down there. Of course, he had a big crowd around him. I didn't get to meet him before but anyway, I sat in the audience and, believe it or not, I was the only non-African American there. So, you know, that was unusual. But he was, you know, that race so that's the reason all them came. Of course, I don't know whether there's even another B-24 member in Waco or not. I'm sure there was but . . . He didn't come whoever it was. So when after he finished his speech and the guy, the emcee got up and said, "Does anybody have anything to say?" You know, "Any questions or anything?" He says, "You got 20 seconds." So I held up my hand, I got up there and I thanked him for his service and everything like that, and kind of explained about how we went overseas or how he'd acted overseas, the cover and everything they gave us. And, you know, I said about all I could think of, and so shook hands with him and left. As I started out the door, a reporter stopped me and started, said, "You mind answering some questions?" I said, "No, I'll be glad to." So I kinda went over again the questions they asked me, you know. So there was a big article in the paper about his being here and what he had to say and everything like that, and the last paragraph in the article is about me.

*That's great. That's a neat story. That's really good.*

**Jim Wellman:** But anyway, I flew 16 missions.

*Sixteen.*

**Jim Wellman:** Over Germany, Austria, Romania, and Hungary. And had some on what they call the railroad, northern Italy, railroad tracks, stations. And the war ended.

*What were the missions like? Were some of them at nighttime or were they all during the day?*

**Jim Wellman:** It was all during the daytime.

*All during the day.*

**Jim Wellman:** Every one of 'em had but plenty of flak. That's another story.

*Tell us about that because I know that had to have been . . .*

**Jim Wellman:** The only time we ever got hit by any flak was one time my ball gunner and I decided we gonna trade just to see . . . You know, just for the fun of it. And that's the only mission we ever got hit on so we never traded again. But he had a piece of flak come in. It was about spent. It came in and landed on the catwalk behind the nose turret which he was flying in. And one of 'em in and cut the oxygen line, the filler line, and landed right behind me in the ball turret.

*Wow.*

**Jim Wellman:** So I kept those for a long time but I don't know what happened to them.

*Just the pieces of fragmentation?*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, one of 'em was about that long and about that wide, and the other was kind of shaped like that.

*It's got to be kind of a helpless feeling I would guess when you're in a crew and your plane is taking flak. There's nothing you can do about it.*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, but, you know, I don't know where else on the airplane that it hit, if it did. Like I say, it was pretty well spent or it wouldn't have . . . It had gone clear through the airplane, you know. But it was interesting flying the ball turret. I mean, it's different from flying the nose turret.

*Sure.*

**Jim Wellman:** Another experience was that we were flying one mission, I don't remember which one it was, but some other plane in our group got hit and caught fire, and we saw eight chutes come out and they pulled the ripcord too soon and every one of 'em caught fire. They got too close to the airplane when they pulled the ripcord, and, of course, billowed right up into the airplane so every one of 'em caught fire and they fell, you know. And the only other accident that I know of was at Davis-Monthan Field, one of 'em crashed on takeoff. I didn't know any of the guys. I never saw a dead body all the time I was in the service, and I thought that was unusual. But we lost some airplanes but I didn't personally know 'em, but then when the war ended, they flew us up to Foja, and we were up there for, I don't know, a week or two, and then we flew from there back to Gioia and got a B-24 to fly back over the . . .

*Fly back home?*

**Jim Wellman:** Uh-huh.

*So you got to fly home instead of taking a two-week-long boat ride?*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, we got to fly home. We took off from there and going to land at Oran, same place that other \_ but we had a dust storm. But we didn't keep flying, we, you know, went to \_, another little one on the coast. Spent the night there and then went to Dakar on the east coast, west coast. And then we flew over the Atlantic and I got to fly the airplane. All of us got to fly the airplane a little bit.

*That's pretty cool.*

**Jim Wellman:** And we landed at Natal, is it Natal? Brazil. And that's another story. We landed there. Supposed to take off the next morning but one of the officers got sick 'cause he liked it there so they spent three days there.

*In Brazil?*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah. And then we flew to what they called British Guiana back then. It's not anymore but, stayed three days there. Then we flew to San Juan and stayed three days there.

*I see a pattern there.*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, then we flew to Savannah, Georgia. That's where we separated and everybody went home for 30-day leave. So after the 30 days, I went back to base at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, and we were gonna train on B-29s so we could go to the Pacific. Two days later they dropped the first atomic bomb. And then a couple days later, they dropped the other one so they saved a bunch of lives. Probably one of 'em was mine.

*That's right. During the war, did you have a chance to write letters home very much to your parents?*

**Jim Wellman:** Oh, yeah. V-mail. Yeah, I used to have a whole bunch of 'em but my kids, think, threw away because we had to cut down from this size home to this size home so we didn't have enough room. And we didn't have a garage to put anything in, you know, so we just had to get rid of a lot of stuff.

*I'm sure your parents appreciated getting those letters from you knowing that you were safe and that sort of thing, and probably worried about you during the war.*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, especially my mother. She was scared to death. Daddy was, you know, he was upset too but when I got on the train to go to Fort Sill, he gave me a 20-dollar bill.

*That was a lot of money.*

**Jim Wellman:** I thought that, well, that was what our pay was. Our pay was 21 dollars a month when we joined up so it was a pretty good amount of money for them. You know, it was the end of the Depression and . . .

*That's right.*

**Jim Wellman:** And my dad had survived, we survived. I didn't even know there was a depression, you know, growing up. I just heard people talk about it but we were doing fine. My

dad owned an electric repair shop and, of course, nobody could afford to buy any new things so he repaired all these electric things, you know.

*That makes sense, sure.*

**Jim Wellman:** But then the war was over or started, and everybody got a job, you know, so in '42, he went to work for the government as electrician.

*Okay. Did you stay pretty close to the men that were in your crew, those nine other guys?*

**Jim Wellman:** My mother wrote to my engineer's wife for a while. He was up in Pennsylvania. But that kind of stopped and I never had any . . . The only contact I had was when I went to these reunions. The first one I went to, they sent in there, you know, the ones that have passed away, and my navigator was in there, named was Mifflin, Ed Mifflin. So that's the only one I know of that had any knowledge of after that.

*Did you ever go to any reunions and that sort of thing years later?*

**Jim Wellman:** I went to two of 'em. One in Peabody, Massachusetts, you know, up around Boston, and then went to one in Albuquerque. But I got pretty busy after that and I couldn't . . . I was retired from . . . You know anything about my business?

*Yeah, sure. I guess we can jump ahead a little bit. Tell us what you did after the war was over. I guess you got out pretty much once it was over at that point.*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, I got out in November of '45 and went to OCU. Well, I went to OU for one semester, decided that I was too far away from my sweetheart. It was in Oklahoma City, so then I went to OCU for three years, and I was on the GI Bill. It ran out, I got married in '47, and had to go to work to support my family, and so after that I kind of, you know, a job here and a job there like that. I finally got a job at an aero design and engineering company which built aero commanders, and worked there for two or three years. And then one of my fellows that worked out on the flight line there said that a dealer in Houston wanted a couple of factory-trained mechanics so he and I went down. Well, both families went down on vacation there in Houston, saw what the job was and everything, and decided that's what we wanted. So a couple months later we both got traveling down there and everything. I moved from . . . I had gone to the top of the scale at aero design. I couldn't go any higher, so we got down there and I found out I'd moved for 15 cents an hour.

*So you didn't know what the wage was before you . . .*

**Jim Wellman:** Well, I think he probably told me but . . .

*Okay.*

**Jim Wellman:** That's the reason we moved because we'd gone to the top of the scale there, so we went to Houston, went to work for Trans-Texas. Well, it was actually Aero Sales, a repair station, and then the owner of Aero Sales also owned Trans-Texas Airways, and evidently got in some trouble with the IRS about dickering between the two so the IRS made him get rid of one of 'em, and, of course, he got rid of the aero, the repair station. And they offered us a job with the airline so we went from a dollar eighty an hour to a dollar ninety-five an hour.

*So this was in the late 1940s then, right?*

**Jim Wellman:** We moved to Houston in 1953, and I went to work for the airline in 1955.

*That was kind of when airlines were really kind of starting out more or less, right?*

**Jim Wellman:** That's right. We started out with 21, or, no, 17 BC. What do you call 'em? Airline anyway, DC-3.

*DC-3s, okay.*

**Jim Wellman:** And, of course, and as things progressed, we went to bigger airplanes and also back then, the government was subsidizing the airlines, you know.

*Yeah, it was very regulated at that point, sure.*

**Jim Wellman:** So they decided to stop subsidizing then, and so we had to be on our own then and decided to expand so they renamed it Texas International.

*Okay.*

**Jim Wellman:** And we could fly anyplace in the United States.

*No longer just within Texas but other routes.*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah.

*Were you based out of Hobby Field?*

**Jim Wellman:** Yes, that's where the airline office was and where the repair station was.

*And your job, you worked on the planes then, right?*

**Jim Wellman:** Yes.

*And you learned that during your time in the Army Air Corps, how to do that sort of thing?*

**Jim Wellman:** Well, when I was at that manufacturing plant, the aero commander. They had us take a test and the first time I'd ever done it but I took two pieces of metal and put it in a vise together. We had to drill a hole every half inch all the way around it. You know, we marked it all, then we had to put rivets in those holes, and one of us bucked the rivet and the other shot. And that's all the training I ever had. Except on the job I had some but . . . Anyway, that's what I was doing when I went to work with the airlines, was in a sheet metal shop.

*Okay.*

**Jim Wellman:** And we'd, of course, go out and work on the . . . We worked in overhaul so we'd completely tore the airplane down to the hull, you know, and checked everything, inspected everything and replaced what needed to be replaced. This other fella and I had to quit smoking about four years later after '55, and the other fella and I were out on a wing in a hangar and we couldn't smoke in the hangar so we had to take a smoke break. So the fella I was working with, one of us was shooting rivets and the other one was bucking 'em, he wanted to take a smoke so

we went back into the shop, and we were sitting there. Of course, he lit up a cigarette and he's smoking but I had quit so I wasn't. And one of the foremen walked in and said, "What's happening?" And I said, "Well, he's taking a smoke break." He said, "Well, what are you doing? You're not smoking." I said, "Well, I'm chewing gum." So anyway, you know, a hundred stories like that but I can't bring 'em all up.

*Sure. How long did you end up working for the airline?*

**Jim Wellman:** Thirty years.

*Thirty years.*

**Jim Wellman:** From 1955, well, actually it was 29 years. From 1955 to '85, 1985.

*What was the name of the airline when you retired?*

**Jim Wellman:** Continental. In the meantime they had a bunch of bankruptcies and union problems.

*Mergers and that sort of thing.*

**Jim Wellman:** And so this fella that bought the airline before we had it named Continental or bought Continental said that he was going to take that airline. And he said it's gonna end finally where there's only two or three major airlines, and he said, "We're gonna be one of 'em." So we ended up Continental and now it's United.

*That's right.*

**Jim Wellman:** So he prophesied.

*Yeah, seen a lot of that. The big American Airlines merger recently.*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, Braniff and all these others.

*Yeah, Braniff went away.*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, Eastern went away.

*Sure. There's a lot of them that have closed down.*

**Jim Wellman:** A lot of the littler airlines went away, Northwest. Now I think we got United, and I think we still got American.

*Of course, Southwest is still huge. It's grown a lot.*

**Jim Wellman:** And that's another story. This guy that started Southwest or helped start it used to work for Trans-Texas. And he got in trouble in his office one time, you know, doing something he shouldn't been doing. So they fired him. So he told them when they fired him, he said, "Well, I'm gonna start an airline that's gonna put you out of business." He almost did that, you know? But anyway . . .

*So you saw the airline business change a lot then from when you started to when you left. I mean, just the . . .*

**Jim Wellman:** Oh, yeah. Went from DC-3s to DC-9s, and had cargo, had planes with cargo, you know, \_ and just strictly seats, and did a lot of modifications on 'em, you know. Redid all the hat racks and stuff like that in the DC-9s.

*So as someone that, as a kid, enjoyed planes and aviation, you spent a lifetime around it then?*

**Jim Wellman:** I did, yeah. Anyway, I learned how to weld while I was in the sheet metal shop, and so I helped the welder weld there, and then a welding job came open in the engine shop so I bid it. So I got welding over there. A lot of it was cracked tailpipes and stuff like that, and then I decided that I'd like to . . . I didn't have an A&P license which was aircraft and powerplant, and so I decided I wanted to try to get that so I just bid out onto what they call a PC crew which did a check of the aircraft when they came in from a flight. We'd check 'em out and then they'd go back out, and started studying. You know, I didn't go to school or anything. I just started learning on the job. And I don't know whether it's still the way but back then you had five tests on powerplant and six on the airframe. And so you could take a test and if you passed it, you'd take all of them and if you pass one, you didn't have to take it again as long as you did it all within two years. So that's what I did, just started after 30 days of each one, I'd, you know, take it and finally got it passed and everything, got my A&P license.

*That's great.*

**Jim Wellman:** And the one reason I wanted to do it 'cause unless you had your A&P license, the airline wouldn't promote you. So I got my license and bid a crew chief job and worked for it for a while, and then they needed a foreman so they interviewed me and hired me as a foreman. And I was a foreman for a while and then they moved me into the office in there, and they had a big room, kind of like a conference room only it's probably about three times as big as this, and put me in charge of, I called it, SPCA—Senior Production Control Manager, or not manager. Anyway, the "A" analyst, that's what it was. And so had a couple of guys under me, and so what we did was we took the airline from paperwork to computer. And so we got that all done, and so then I went down on the floor operating a computer. You know, what we do is line stuff up so we wouldn't close up an area and still have something to do in it so we had to line it out so it would be coming, you know, when it was supposed to be done. So I did that for a little while, and then they had a layoff, and so I was one of the ones they layed off, of course. They could get a computer operator a lot less than what they were paying me so . . . I had time on the union so I got to go back on the floor, and I worked as an electrician until I retired.

*That's great.*

**Jim Wellman:** But during that one union problem where they busted the union, I crossed the picket line 'cause I had a family to support.

*Sure.*

**Jim Wellman:** I went from 17 dollars an hour to 10 dollars an hour over the weekend.

*Wow.*

**Jim Wellman:** And during that time we had five children, and our middle child got leukemia and died when he was 19. But he had a son got to be with him before he died, and that son is now a major in the Army in Korea.

*That's great. So that's your grandson now, a major in the Army. That's great.*

**Jim Wellman:** And like I said, my son was in Vietnam too. He was aircraft, what you call aircraft controller, yeah.

*That's great.*

**Jim Wellman:** Anyway, after that I worked for another airline, Emerald Air. It was just a local, you know, kind of like a commuter, and worked for them for a couple years and did the same thing for them that I did on the computer for the other one. And then, in the meantime, my wife and I bought a penny ball gum business, and we had 26 counties around San Antonio, and we also ran Lampasas to Corsicana through Waco and Temple. And we did that for about 10 years, and thought that was gonna support us for retirement, you know and everything, but it went south after we turned it over to somebody else so that ended that. You know, I had to go back to work so . . . But during that time I did that, you know, reunion thing, and I think it was '92 and '93 that I went to that.

*How did you end up in Waco?*

**Jim Wellman:** Well, that's another story. We got the gum business and we started out, we were running it out of Austin. And, of course, Austin wasn't on our route so we decided to move. We moved to New Braunfels, and we had New Braunfels. And so, can't remember if we decided we needed to move from there, so we moved to Marion and operated out of there for a while. And then we . . . This was renting. Then we bought a house in Kingsbury which is about 10 miles east of Seguin on Highway 90 and operated out of there for a while. I thought of something else I was gonna say . . .

*Somehow you ended up in Waco.*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, okay. So anyway in the meantime, my number two son, been married for 15 years, no children, and so they got an opportunity to adopt a couple of little Hispanic girls. I think they were one and a half and two or three, something like that. And so they did that, adopted 'em and everything, and then she got pregnant. So they went from no children to three in less than a year.

*That's great.*

**Jim Wellman:** That's the reason we moved to Waco, because, I mean, they were just . . . Especially his wife, she was just overloaded.

*Sure, that's a lot.*

**Jim Wellman:** I mean, she wasn't real healthy herself. She had allergies and everything so we just decided to move.

*For family.*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, they had about five acres so we moved a double-wide onto the property and then helped 'em out.

*Yes sir. So I want to ask you, because in front of us here you have a bunch of pictures, and I wanted to . . .*

**Jim Wellman:** This is my crew.

*I wanted to have you tell us a little bit about them.*

**Jim Wellman:** Well, \_ or not.

*You don't have to . . .*

**Jim Wellman:** Can you pick me out in there?

*Well, let me see. I'm looking at the picture. We're looking at the photo right now.*

**Jim Wellman:** I've changed a little bit.

*Yeah, I think . . .*

**Jim Wellman:** Some can pick it out and some can't.

*Are you in the back row?*

**Jim Wellman:** I believe I'm in the back row.

*Yeah, you're in the back row. Is this you right here?*

**Jim Wellman:** That's me.

*We got it! We figured it out.*

**Jim Wellman:** Well, the officers are down here. This is the copilot, bombardier, navigator and the pilot. And this was the upper turret, and I was nose, and he's the radio operator, and this guy had the waist guns, and then this was the ball turret gunner.

*When and where do you think that photo was taken?*

**Jim Wellman:** It was taken in Savannah, Georgia, after we got in with the airplane.

*After you got back home?*

**Jim Wellman:** Uh-huh.

*So that crew together flew 16 missions, and then came back home?*

**Jim Wellman:** Actually, the radio operator flew more than that because sometimes they'd need a radio operator on another flight.

*On other flights, okay. Did everyone get along pretty well? A pretty tight-knit crew?*

**Jim Wellman:** Pretty well. We had a tail guy, this guy right here. He was kind of odd. He was kind of an isolationist. He didn't want to have much to do with anybody else.

*Okay, kind of introverted guy.*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, and so . . .

*That's a great photograph though. I'd like to get a copy of that if possible to put in our archives. Maybe can get your help with that. If you all have a scanner here, just scan it and email it to me. We'd love to have that.*

**Jim Wellman:** And this . . .

*What's this photo?*

**Jim Wellman:** This photo is the only . . . At the time, I don't know whether it still is or not, is the only B-24 that was flying after the war.

*And in the photo, it's next to an F-16.*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, and I think that's Boston, I don't know. It flew around to different reunions, and it was in Boston because we toured through it but I don't know whether this picture was Boston.

*Yeah, I don't recognize that skyline but that's a neat photograph.*

**Jim Wellman:** Looks like it's got some sort of stadium there or something right here.

*It does. Tell us, sir, about this picture here. This smaller black and white.*

**Jim Wellman:** That's my nose turret.

*That was your turret.*

**Jim Wellman:** Uh-huh.

*Did you take this picture?*

**Jim Wellman:** Oh, no. I don't know who took it but I got it someplace.

*That's great.*

**Jim Wellman:** And I wasn't in it at the time.

*Tell us about . . . You have some of your medals and ribbons here as well, some in a shadowbox.*

**Jim Wellman:** I mean my daughter made this up for me. Got the Air Medal with a cluster, and Good Conduct Medal. One of 'ems European . . .

*European service.*

**Jim Wellman:** And the African service and I don't remember what that one is.

*Yeah, American campaign is what it says. What is this book here? It says My Life in the Service.*

**Jim Wellman:** That's my diary.

*You kept a diary.*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah. I could take it out but . . .

*Oh, no. You got it in there, but what did you keep in your diary? Just day to day notes or . . .*

**Jim Wellman:** Actually, mainly when I thought about it. It wasn't day to day but I kept track of all the missions and where we went, stuff like that.

*It's great that you have that.*

**Jim Wellman:** Anytime we went on one, put a bomb in here. This side over here has the rest of 'em.

*It looks like you had some pictures or other things that you put inside that book as well in the back.*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, well, I think that's what they called a short snorter. That was the money that we had over there, and we taped it together and that ruined it really. Though I just had to . . .

*Put it in there, yeah.*

**Jim Wellman:** It dried out and everything. And I got this . . .

*A couple of the wing devices.*

**Jim Wellman:** Actually this one I had, it came from and my own, and this one was with these.

*And what is that wing for? Is that to note that you were on a bomb crew or on a bomber crew?*

**Jim Wellman:** This one here was an armor gunner. I finally became an armor gunner, and I don't . . . This here, I got all these medals because I contacted . . . They listed some medals on my discharge that I didn't have. So I contacted Chet Edwards.

*Okay, when he was a congressman.*

**Jim Wellman:** And so he went out and he got all these. Actually all I had at the time was a Good Conduct Medal and the Air Medal. I had a friend, he got this hat for me, and he got a jacket that says, "Nose gunner B-24," and my name, and he put on it, "First there and first to leave," you know, stuff like that, and had the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force on the shoulder. So after he got this for me, and I said, "Well, you know, there's no Air Medal there." So he got this.

*He got the ribbons made.*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, he sent off to do them, and I couldn't believe it. You know he spent a lot of money on this.

*That's neat. I'm glad you have this to show us. Over here you have some folders full of paperwork.*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, these are . . . I think these are all the reunions except for maybe one or two.

*Oh, okay. Kind of like the programs from the reunions.*

**Jim Wellman:** Well, it's a report of what was done at that reunion.

*Yeah, I see. From the '80s and '90s. Here's one from Peabody, Massachusetts, which I think you mentioned in 1992. That's great. Have you had a chance to see a B-24 since you last flew in one? Have you seen any in person in museums or things like that?*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, in California they got one out there in a museum. And I think they have one in Washington, DC, at that museum there. Of course, you know they rotate stuff around there. You see it one time and the next time it won't be there. It will be in a warehouse.

*Yeah, all the different displays.*

**Jim Wellman:** Of course, this one here. We went through it when we were out there on . . . That's the only other one, actually one that's flying. And these are my dog tags.

*Were those the ones you actually wore?*

**Jim Wellman:** Uh-huh.

*That's great. It's wonderful you still have all those things.*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, I had a lot more than this but when we moved I couldn't bring it all over. Actually have, Tom, he's a bug on B-24s. He loves the B-24s, and he was in Vietnam and he wasn't . . . I think he was in Vietnam so he didn't have anything to do with B-24s.

*And who is this?*

**Jim Wellman:** For some reason, Tom felt . . .

**Female voice:** He's another resident.

*Another resident?*

**Jim Wellman:** He came in, you know, raptured with the B-24. That's his favorite airplane so I had two models of the B-24 and I gave those to him. And also, this is his here. I gave this to him.

*Yeah, looks like a neat book.*

**Jim Wellman:** Oh, it is. It's a lot of . . .

*The Log of the Liberators.*

**Jim Wellman:** Yeah, it's a bunch of stories about things that happened. That would be . . . If somebody wanted to really research the war, and, of course, this has the Liberators in South Pacific too. But it has almost every one in there.

*That's great. What stands out most to you about the B-24? Is there anything in particular you liked the best about it?*

**Jim Wellman:** Well, I never did get to fly on another bomber so I really couldn't compare everything, you know. Look, one time I was in, before I was in the service, I must have been just a teenager, we took a trip from Oklahoma City to Fort Worth, and while we were there, two B-24s collided in midair. Of course, back then, you know, you could just walk on to the site and look. So we went out to see it and it had, you know, stuff laying around. So I picked up a pair of earphones and took 'em with me. I don't know whatever happened to 'em but anyway, you see the impressions where the guys hit, you know, in the ground. And then I never dreamed I'd be on a B-24 later on.

*Wow. I think this is great that you have all these pictures and I'm honored just to hear your story about it. I don't know if I mentioned to you before we started but we're part of the State of Texas, the General Land Office. But what we have at the Land Office is archives that go back to the 1700s. We have the original land grant that David Crockett's widow received after he was killed at the Alamo. We have the original registro which is a big, leather-bound volume that Stephen F. Austin kept of all the settlers that first came to Texas. And so what we're doing with these interviews is saving these in those archives, and our goal is hopefully hundreds of years from now, people will listen to these interviews, and with that in mind, is there anything you would want to say to somebody listening to this whether it's your friends and family or people we don't even know hundreds of years from now? Anything you would want to say to them about your service or anything in general?*

**Jim Wellman:** Well, you know, they call us heroes but we just did what we had to do. Of course, back then you had to do it 'cause they had the draft, you know. Nowadays they don't have the draft. In Vietnam, I think they had the draft at that time.

*They did.*

**Jim Wellman:** That's the reason my son had to go, but I don't know. I enjoyed talking to you, and I like to talk about myself I guess you'd say, and my experiences, you know?

*Yeah, it's about your stories and the things you did and the people you served with. It adds to that. So hopefully somebody can listen to this years from now and learn from it.*

**Jim Wellman:** You want names of the crew or do you want that?

*Oh, sure, if you want to share that with me. I definitely would like . . . What I'd really like, sir, is if we can get an email copy of that, and you can let me know who those people are in the email, and then what we can do, if it's all right with you, is we can put that picture on our website at some point along with this interview, and so people can listen to it and they can also see the photograph and put the caption on there.*

**Jim Wellman:** Do you want me to list it on here?

*What we can do is have her email it to me who's in the rows left to right. Of course, we know who you are now in that photo.*

**Jim Wellman:** You'd be surprised how many people can't pick me out.

*There's a lot of veterans that don't have photographs. They didn't take them or they lost them or whatever.*

**Jim Wellman:** You can see I had a little hair then.

*But it's great that you have that photo because it's nice when people do listen to the interviews that we put online, they'll be able to see that photograph and any other photos you would want to share, and then it adds to the story I think and the ball turret as well.*

**Jim Wellman:** While I was at OCU, I had one guy that was an artist, and he did a picture of me in charcoal or whatever that is, and I still got that. These are the pictures I could bring with me. I don't have any room for any more.

*This is great. In a couple weeks, we're going to mail you copies of this interview on CDs so you can give them to your family or friends or whomever or keep some for yourself along with a letter and certificate of appreciation from Commissioner Patterson. And it's just a very small way of the State of Texas saying thank you to you for your service to our nation.*

**Jim Wellman:** Like I say, it was an experience that I'd never like to go through again but glad I did.

*Exactly, and we're glad that you're able to share it with us today.*

**Jim Wellman:** I guess I have one regret.

*Yes sir.*

**Jim Wellman:** That's what the country has turned into since then, you know. Not like it was when I was growing up.

*Sure, but I think there are a lot of people that appreciate what you did with your service and those of others that served with you.*

**Jim Wellman:** I talk to people who had it a lot worse than I did, and especially one guy here who was on Normandy on D-Day. 'Course when I was going to college, we had guys that were POWs and things like that, you know.

*Exactly. Well, sir, again, it's been an honor to be able to do this interview with you. I appreciate it very much.*

**Jim Wellman:** I appreciate y'all doing this 'cause I feel like you do. Days go by and everybody, nobody knows anything about World War II anymore. Not many do anyway.

*That's right.*

**Jim Wellman:** They call that, what? The best years of our lives or something like that.

*Yeah, the Greatest Generation.*

**Jim Wellman:** Nice hearing you.

*Well, thanks.*