

Mount Airy Museum  
Interview with Eldridge Marshall  
August 22, 2001

**Teresa:** Today is August 22, 2001 and we are sitting in the living room of the home of Eldridge Marshall. Mr. Marshall will be our interviewee for our oral history interview today. Those present are myself, Teresa Yeatts, and Mr. Eldridge Marshall. The purpose of this <sup>oral</sup> world history interview is to collect and preserve Eldridge Marshall's knowledge of the Flat Rock Community and his life stories. The interview will be conducted by Teresa Yeatts and will be tape recorded and transcribed to be included in the Museums collection for research purposes. The Mount Airy Museum of Regional History will maintain the highest professional and ethical standards in the preservation and use of this oral history interview. With that being said the first question is "Will you state your full name, address, and your age".

**Eldridge:** Well my full name is Julius Eldridge Marshall but when I went in the Navy they left the "Julius" off so I've always gone by just Eldridge. I live now at 180 Merritt Road but it was 1036 Merritt Road for years but now it is 180. I'm 80 years and like 3 days being 5 months old. I was born in Patrick County Virginia in what was that time known as The Phil Belton House and Dr. A.M. Gates delivered me, I was a fifteen dollar baby.

Teresa: Is that what he charged?

Eldridge: Yes. And I lived in that part of the country and here is what my life was like: I was out in the field working in 1942 and I went home and my mother said "Son what are you doing out this time of day?". I said I'm going to Mount Airy to ask some questions about the Navy. She said don't join without asking a lot of questions. So I walked from up in Virginia to down to what is the city limits of Mount Airy now I guess and I got a ride the rest of the way in. I walked in the recruiting office and the recruiting officer said "Yes Sir, what can I do for you?" I said I want to join the Navy Sir and I joined the Navy and I left my first name off so it's been that way ever since. So, I was down at the fairground on Saturday night and Tom Moser, later my brother in law, I said I'm leaving for the Navy Monday morning and he said I am too. I went up to the bus station and Troy Green Easter and Hansel Coe and Thomas Lee Moser and I got on the bus and went to Raleigh and got in the Navy. I went to Camp Norfolk, NOV Norfolk Base, for training one of the last groups I guess to ever go back there during that time. I went through training there and got a 6 week leave and came home and went to Camp Bradford out on a ship for training. I was first assigned to an LCI and then assigned to LST-2 that went to Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. I got on the ship the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December 1942 and left

Christmas morning down the Ohio River. I left Norfolk Virginia April 26, 1943 and got to Oran Africa on May 26 or 28<sup>th</sup>, two numbers on that. I got there and stayed in the Mediterranean, I've got a list of all of our names on it somewhere around here. I was in the invasion of Sicily on July 10, 1943.

Our ship put the first load of tanks on the beach and I've got a lot of information here you can maybe take and make a copy of.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Eldridge:** Then after 5 trips to Sicily I went back to Lake Bizerte Africa and on the 22<sup>nd</sup>/23<sup>rd</sup> of August I was in an air raid that I didn't think would ever end and I did even expect to see the next sun and I could see the flames of a burning ship and hear sailors screaming for help and nothing I could do. The German propaganda reported sinking 100 ships that night but they didn't I don't believe. Then I was in the invasion of Salerno, Italy. The book laying on the table in there has a picture of my ship, one of the first ones.

Somewhere here but I couldn't find it, it may be in some of the papers. Our Captain asked the Admiral not to make us go in because we could see the tanks shooting at us from the mountain side and the admiral made us go in so we were one of the first ships to go in Salerno, Italy. We went through it and made 3 more trips to Salerno. We went as far as Tripoli twice and went to Taranto twice and then lacking about 2 days staying 6 months in the

Mediterranean I went to England. I got there December 3<sup>rd</sup> but going from Gibraltar to England we were in a storm when the waves were 65 feet high. We got to England the 5<sup>th</sup> day of December, 1943 and we were in different towns; Plymouth, Falmouth, South Hampton and I got a 5 day leave and went and stayed in London 5 days one time. Then we went to Milford Haven Wales and stayed a day or two then went to Northern Island to London and stayed about a month and they put more guns on our ship. Then we came back on June 5 we were loaded for standby to see where we were needed and one of our LST's got sunk and they sent us in and we landed D-Day morning at Sword Beach France, I made ten more trips to France after that. On the eleventh trip they took my ship in and put railroad rails in and I have a picture of trains leaving our ship. I stayed there, that was the last trip. I came back and loaded for the 12<sup>th</sup> trip and setting out in the harbor at South Hampton. When we got out there they sent a message out, a code message, more small boat and send in for draft orders and I was down in the paint bunker and I just left the paint sitting on deck and I grabbed a ladder and got out and started shaking hands with everybody. I was one of the 22 that got to come back, the ship left the rest of them over there until the decommissioned the ship and turned it over to the British. Twenty two of us left and came home. We got to New York and came by the statue of Liberty

and we got a hearty welcome at the shipyard. The Navy had one of the bases up in Long Island come down with a band amongst us all and really treated us nice. We went into camp and the commander running around like a messenger boy said to get ready and about 1 o'clock they ordered us to all fall out and go over and we had one more special meal, anything we wanted, steak or anything else. He said I'm doing everything I can to get you home as quick as I can. The next morning they had us fall out at 8 o'clock and a band fell out in front of us and marched across to go back to the mess hall for breakfast. They had barbers to come in from New York to cut our hair and all of that so we would be ready and when I found out I had left the ship I wrote a letter home and told them that I was going to be busy and they might not hear from me for a day or two. I walked in and surprised them. My dad was curing tobacco and went to the house and said my son will be home before I get through curing tobacco. They said have you been in the barn asleep and dreamed that? He said I sat down at the barn and saw him walking up. If he had of stayed at the barn a few more minutes I would have walked up and surprised him with my 30 day leave.

**Teresa:** So you only got to come home for 30 days that time?

**Eldridge:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** How old were you then when you were first in the Navy?

**Eldridge:** I was born March 25, 1921 and I went in the Navy, sworn in October 6, 1942.

**Teresa:** So you were about 21?

**Eldridge:** Yeah, 21 ½ or something. I volunteered and I've never been sorry but of the 4 of us that got on the bus and went, Thomas Lee Moser that married my sister after we got back, died 22 years ago of a heart attack.

Troy Green Easter committed suicide. Hansel Coe, did you ever know him? He worked for the town.

**Teresa:** I think I do know him, or did.

**Eldridge:** He had a heart attack in town and died. Everytime I would see him out no matter where it was he would always say "Hello Sailor Boy".

I've got a lot of information here. On July 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup>, did you ever know Vance Hallman that lived on Mitchell Street?

**Teresa:** No, I don't think so.

**Eldridge:** He was in the medics in the army and it was the US Army Airforce not the US Airforce like it is now. Patton ordered the planes to come in and I've got it right there on top of that page right there how many it was. They were supposed to come over about 500 ships anchored at Gela Beach around in that area and they were supposed to come around and they came over and the Germans were coming through dropping bombs. We

shot down some of them, I believe it was 23, I've got it in there. It killed 318 para troopers, but anyway Vance Alderman was in the medics and they saw them dropping in behind them and thought it was the enemy shooting in behind them and they were shooting too but Vance was a medic and didn't have a gun but the others did. Wars are a lot of trouble.

**Teresa:** The ship that you were on, what did you do? I mean, did you have to fire those guns?

**Eldridge:** I was the gunner's mate. I worked on guns and was gun captain over a gun crew.

**Teresa:** So after you came home for that 30 day leave did you have to go back?

**Eldridge:** I went back to Camp Bradford and had another week of training and went to Chicago Navy Pier and stayed 10 days and went to Great Lakes Training Base and stayed 10 days and it was 12 degrees the morning we left there. Then we went to Seneca Illinois and got on LST 1125 USS Brontes and stayed on it 3 weeks from the time on it until the time we got to Baltimore and then got off and I was sent to Bath, Maine and got on a brand new destroyer the USS Sarsfield.

**Teresa:** The USS Sarsfield?

**Eldridge:** Yes, the USS Sarsfield. I was a gunners mate on it and I had a quad 40. Have you ever been on a US battleship?

**Teresa:** Yes

**Eldridge:** A quad 40 is a 40 millimeter gun.

**Teresa:** I've seen all the guns, I'm not sure it was that one.

**Eldridge:** It is not one of the big ones. It shot bullets about 1 inch and 5/8.

We went to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and stayed about 1 month and then came back to Boston and they were experimenting with German design propeller on the ship and we went up and down the coast of Maine I don't know how many times to see the speed, vibration, R.P.M.'s and all of that. Then I came to Norfolk Virginia the gunner officer asked him to re-inlist and I told him I wouldn't stay. The hardest assignment I ever had while I was in the Navy was one day when the executive office called me up and I was on stand by duty and told me to go down and get my pistol and a "SP" badge and get a "billy" and come up and take a shipmate to the hospital to be examined before they could put him in the brig. He had been arrested and broken arrest twice by officers and once by the "SP". They said the only thing not to do was don't hit him with the pistol, shoot him and hit him with the billy and if you let him get away you will spend time in the brig until he



is apprehended so that was the hardest assignment I ever had. I did short patrol duty in Boston and I wouldn't want to do that now.

**Teresa:** You would not??

**Eldridge:** I wouldn't want to but I did then. On the way back from Cuba the chief gunner mate, not an officer, said Marshall you have the best 40 millimeter gun crew on the ship and we're going to take everyone of them and give you 14 new men and that will probably be the last crew you ever train, and it was.

**Teresa:** So how much time were you in the Navy total?

**Eldridge:** 3 years, 2 months, and 3 days

**Teresa:** Was all of that World War II

**Eldridge:** Yes, all of that. About 10 months after Pearl Harbor until after the end of the war I was there when the Germany surrendered and I was there when the first bomb was dropped August 6, 1945, the atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and then 3 days later they dropped another one on Nagasaki. I got out on the point system, I had enough ribbons and service to get out on the point system.

**Teresa:** Were you at Pearl Harbor?

**Eldridge:** No, I went in 10 months after. I remember that day though. My mother and I took my dad to Bassett Virginia stopped at Ms. Clarks, she had

2 sons over there and we didn't even have a radio on the car and she had heard about that and was worried because she had 2 sons over there. Do you know Gerald Collins?

**Teresa:** No.

**Eldridge:** He was in the Jack Leach Reserves out of Virginia and we stayed busy. I've got a picture frame in yonder with some of the scenes and my medals on it.

**Teresa:** I would love to see it before I leave.

**Eldridge:** Yeah, I'd be glad to show you.

**Teresa:** You said you grew up in Virginia?

**Eldridge:** Yes.

**Teresa:** So what brought you to Mount Airy?

**Eldridge:** Well, after I got out I was walking down the street one night, Ruby doesn't like for me to tell this; I was walking down the street and Polly Pardue was Ruby's beautician and she was my sisters beautician.

Polly saw me walking and said Eldridge would you like to take a ride? So I got in the back seat and Ruby was in there and that is where I met Ruby.

**Teresa:** So you met Ruby here in Mount Airy?

**Eldridge:** Yes, and she came home (she lived up on this street on the right up here). She came home and told her mother she had met me and wrote my name down but didn't know if she would ever see me again.

**Teresa:** Well how long did you court before you two were married?

**Eldridge:** Maybe 3 ½ months.

**Teresa:** Well it must have been love at first sight.

**Eldridge:** Well she is a good woman.

**Teresa:** Yes she is.

**Eldridge:** I bought the land from here to Frank Hensley's one time and sold part of it to some woman and I built this house across the street here and I went to work for Miracle Made Cookware and I sold it and went to Danville Virginia and I would have always been worried sick over selling the house but Brenda would have been the age to have been at Flat Rock School when it burnt. (Could not interpret what he said after this sentence)

**Teresa:** So you just have one child?

**Eldridge:** No, I have a son Dwight, is there a picture over there of him in a white coat?

**Teresa:** Yes, so you have a son Dwight and a daughter.

**Eldridge:** Yes, she married Charles Joyce and they have Sunny, and Adrian. Adrian just finished down at South Carolina a couple of weeks ago

and may someday get his Masters. Sunny teaches up at Cedar Ridge and she told me a year before she got married, 3 years and something ago, "Papa if you're able I want you to do my ceremony and I got to do that for Sunny and now she's expecting.

**Teresa:** Oh good.

**Eldridge:** It could be any day. The doctor told her he wouldn't try to stop it and it could be any day now. She wore something yesterday that gave her a terrible allergy and she went to the doctor yesterday for him to give her something for it.

**Teresa:** So is this your daughter's daughter?

**Eldridge:** Yes.

**Teresa:** So what is your daughter's first name

**Eldridge:** Brenda, she sings in the choir and we think she does a good job of singing solo sometimes.

**Teresa:** I've heard her.

**Eldridge:** Over the years she has sang like, have you ever heard "Oh what a beautiful morning, Oh what a beautiful day"?

**Teresa:** I've heard the song.

**Eldridge:** Brenda does a wonderful job, or used to, she hasn't in a long time. She sang a paid soloist at the Presbyterian church for a number of months or something.

**Teresa:** So is Ruby still working?

**Eldridge:** Yes, working everyday.

**Teresa:** Is she?

**Eldridge:** I don't draw enough to live on. If she wasn't working I don't know what we would do.

**Teresa:** Well I've seen you fill in as a minister at our church. Have you been to theology school?

**Eldridge:** I went 3 years to Fruitland Baptist Bible Institute.

**Teresa:** What is the name of it.

**Eldridge:** Fruitland Baptist Bible Institute.

**Teresa:** Is that where you're ring is from?

**Eldridge:** Yes.

**Teresa:** Where is that school?

**Eldridge:** Do you know where Hendersonville is?

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Eldridge:** Ednaville is right this side of it and Joe May encouraged me to go just for 6 weeks and I went '56, '57, '58, and '59 and then stayed out until

'64 and went back and got my diploma in '65. One real outstanding thing in ministering I was asked to preach at New Bethel up around Pipers Gap, do you know where that New Bethel church is?

**Teresa:** On Pipers Gap, I've probably been by it. Is it a new church.

**Eldridge:** No, its been there for years. On Mother's Day 1965 they asked me to preach up there and a little boy about 11 or 12 years old came up and joined the church and years later Oren Bradley and the little boy's well not little then a good size man, his mother, his grandmother all called and wrote me letters and wanted me to come and see him get dedicated. He had finished high school, finished college, finished seminary, and had met a girl in seminary & married her named Linda and he was assigned to the outer most part of Chile as a missionary in Chile. I saw his mother, about two or three years ago, time slips by, I don't know, and I didn't recognize her but she recognized me and she said he had come back from Chile and is now a missionary over in Georgia.

**Teresa:** That is wonderful.

**Eldridge:** That was kind of the highlight of my years in ministry. I've preached in a lot of churches back years ago but now I don't do anything but complain.

**Teresa:** You don't do anything but what?

**Eldridge:** Complain.

**Teresa:** Oh, well I haven't heard you complaining. Well, what did you do through your life as far as a career or was being a minister your career?

**Eldridge:** I never pastored a church that paid enough to live on and Ruby and I were paying tithes and \$60-\$65 a month rent on what we both made and the church was supposed to pay me \$100 a month and sometimes they didn't do that and they expected me to be a taxi driver and everything else. That was the downfall I guess. Oren Bradley and some of them asked me sometimes to take another church but I wouldn't take it. The first one I pastored was Lambsburg then a little church Westside in Hillsville and it was down below the road and Joe May and I, you know Joe May don't you?

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Eldridge:** We went by there some time a year or a year and a half ago and on the other side of the road they have really built a beautiful church.

**Teresa:** What other experience in your eighty years would you want to tell me about? How the town has changed, how the world has changed.

**Eldridge:** Well, I think I told my wife in the last day or two or I told somebody that there have been more changes in my lifetime than there has ever been up to my lifetime. Don't you think?

**Teresa:** I agree.

**Eldridge:** I'm old enough that they used to say if anything entered your heart you were dead. They froze my heart 7 ½ hours and put a pig valve in and 3 bi-passes and I asked why did they freeze it and they said they could shock it and stop it but if they freeze it and let it thawed out it would be in rhythm but I've had an irregular heart beat most of the time ever since. That was the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 9 years ago, but 7 years ago last March on my birthday the 25<sup>th</sup> of March they took 18-20 inches of my colon out. **\*\*Could not interpret\*\***

**Teresa:** Goodness.

**Eldridge:** People say "You look so good and everything", it's hard for them to believe there is anything wrong with me.

**Teresa:** Right. Some pain you can't see.

**Eldridge:** I don't know what else you might have on your mind to ask me.

**Teresa:** Do you remember how Mount Airy used to be, Downtown and surrounding areas?

**Eldridge:** When I was in the Navy I told them that Mount Airy just had 3 stoplights and some of my shipmates laughed at me. Someone said "I bet he's telling the truth" and I was telling the truth. Now there is more than that. I remember when the Creeds ran the Ice Cream place on the other side of Main Street and you could go in and get a banana split for 35 cents and



down at the fork in the street of Junction Street and East Oak Street was a little ice cream place and you could walk down there, we didn't have a sidewalk, and get two cones for a nickel. There have just been so many changes and Johnson's Restaurant on the other side of the street somewhere about where Leonard's is was the uptown place to eat and there is a restaurant right next to the alley by what used to be The Grand Theater, I don't know what is there now, and there was a restaurant in there and when I came back from over seas and I was used to getting up and walking out without paying and all of that and I went in there and ordered the biggest steak they had and came out without paying and got up to the BlueRidge Hotel and I happened the think of it and I went back down there and the man said you're honest enough to come back so I wouldn't have the money if you gave it to me.

**Teresa:** Well how about that.

**Eldridge:** I didn't do it on purpose.

**Teresa:** So you remember the BlueRidge Hotel?

**Eldridge:** Yes.

**Teresa:** That is where my office is now, but it was actually on the parking lot.

**Eldridge:** That used to be Whittleman's corner on that ledge. Old timers would sit out there and whittle and trade knives and spit tobacco juice on the sidewalk. You didn't know about that did you?

**Teresa:** No I did not.

**Eldridge:** My dad grew up in Laurel Fork and in 1913 Grandpa moved below the mountain and my dad came 13 times to Mount Airy before he saw a car.

**Teresa:** Really?

**Eldridge:** 13 times. My mother was a little bitty woman, strong, gracious alive. For a little bitty woman she was just simply strong. During the the Depression her daddy died in 1935 in February and he had 4 tracks of land and she bought one of them, 155 acres and 5/10 with a little two room boxed house on it with a little bitty attic for \$250 and we would cut wood for one dollar a cord and help load it and sell wood for a dollar a cord. My dad and I got a job in Bassett making \$3.20 a day and she cut a cord of wood with an ax herself and got a dollar for it. She was just the "workingest" little woman you had ever seen.

**Teresa:** Now did you have brothers and sisters?

**Eldridge:** I have two sisters. One you might see if you ever go to Wal-Mart, do you?

**Teresa:** Occasionally. What is her name?

**Eldridge:** Loraine Moser, she is a door greeter.

**Teresa:** I do know Loraine.

**Eldridge:** My other sister Opal lives up just off Willis Gap. They named the road or street or whatever you want to call it where my dad used to live Alias Marshall Lane. She was down here yesterday and we went over to Hardees and ate and she was 78 last March and Loraine was 76 the 11<sup>th</sup> of August.

**Teresa:** So you're all real close in age.

**Eldridge:** My dad never owned a car until I got out of the Navy and bought one and sold it, we never had electric lights until I got out of the Navy. The only time we had running water was when my mother said son take this bucket and run to the spring and get a bucket of water.

**Teresa:** That is amazing.

**Eldridge:** I'm not sorry though.

**Teresa:** You have definitely had a full and exciting life.

**Eldridge:** I've lived in houses that never had a screen door or screen window, fireplace and cracks in the floor. One place we lived I remember the wind would blow right hard and you'd see a woman's dress raise up a little bit. When I came back from over seas my dad and I came to Mount

Airy and I talked him into buying a heater. We got a piece of tin and cut out and put in there and it was so much easier to heat and so much better but it was still far from being comfortable. He bought that and bought a new stove and we weren't the poorest of the poor but we were poor. Have you ever read Tom Brokaw's book *The Greatest Generation*?

**Teresa:** No but Dad has read it. I've heard it is good.

**Eldridge:** There is one place in there where one of them got to be a high official in the maybe the Senate or Congress or something and he walked to school or rode a horse or something and he'd take a shotgun to school with him everyday hoping he would kill a rabbit or squirrel or pheasant or something to have something to eat.

**Teresa:** I'll have to borrow Dad's and read it, I've heard a lot about it.

**Eldridge:** Do you want to borrow it?

**Teresa:** Well I'll borrow Daddy's but thank you. Dad has it.

**Eldridge:** People haven't always been rich and I'm afraid, really afraid, you know you can't throw anything up high enough that it won't come down and I'm afraid that I may not be living but I'm afraid that there will be another depression.

**Teresa:** It is definitely slowing down.

**Eldridge:** And everyday you hear of more being laid off and I heard them say the last few days that just in North Carolina alone there have been 49,000 laid off in this year maybe.

**Teresa:** That sounds right. There have probably been 4,000-5,000 right here in our county.

**Eldridge:** And I don't know your politics or anything but I sure don't like Easley's aiming of raising the sales tax.

**Teresa:** I know, I don't like it either. I've been getting my tax bills the last couple of weeks and there all so high from the county and the city. Well they're taxing those people that are working and the people that are out of work can't help it.

**Eldridge:** I don't even know how to say it. Ruby works for Kentucky Derby Hosiery and I don't see how in the world they will survive the waste and stuff. People don't care, I worked at Sealtest Dairies almost 14 years and when I'd drink a carton of milk or lemonade I'd pull out the money and pay for it just like if I was selling it to a store or something. I stayed there 14 years and when I checked up on it the last time I was \$1.35 over and I told Sam Vaughn, you know Sam?

**Teresa:** Yes

**Eldridge:** I said Sam it may have fallen out of my little change purse and I may have mis-counted and someone may come back and tell you I have mis-counted. I saw him about 6 weeks later and I asked him how did I check up and he said nothing ever showed up but if I had owed him \$1.35 I would still have owed him \$1.35.

**Teresa:** Right. Did he give it back to you?

**Eldridge:** No.

**Teresa:** Well did you say I could look at some of your papers and maybe take them and copy them?

**Eldridge:** Oh yes, you sure can.

**Teresa:** That would be great. Well I'm going to stop this now.