

# Richard I Bong Veterans Historical Center

Finding aid for

**James Eaton papers**

Date range: 1942-1952

Bulk dates: 1942-1945

Finding Aid created by Britta Lind, 2020

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*Creator:* James Eaton and the Army Air Force

*Extent:* 1 box (half of a linear foot)

*Abstract:* Includes military records, correspondence, newsletters, and magazines belonging to James Eaton.

*Call number:* Range B, Unit 3, Shelf B

*Language:* The material is in English

*Acquisition Information:* These records came to the Center from James Eaton's daughter, Nancy Eaton, in October 2020.

*Access Restrictions:* The record group is open to research.

*Copyright:* Copyright belongs to the Richard I Bong Veterans Historical Center. *Cite as:*

[item], folder, box, James Eaton papers, Richard I. Bong Veterans Historical Center.

*History:* James Riley Eaton was born on August 28, 1924 in Fargo, ND. Following his graduation from Fargo High School in 1943 and a Radio class at Moorhead State Teachers' College, he volunteered to join the Army Air Force later that year. Eaton completed Army Air Forces Navigation School (AAFNS) at San Marcos Air Field (SMAAF) in San Marcos, TX in April 1944 and began flying missions in B-24 heavy bombers in July of that year. 25 of his combat missions were completed in B-24 planes in countries such as Italy, Austria, Hungary, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia. He began as a pilot in the 376<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group and the 515<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron for these bombing missions before moving on as a navigator in the 51<sup>st</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron. Eaton then completed an additional 43 combat missions by the end of 1945 in which he was a C-47 navigator for daytime and nighttime missions dropping supplies and landing to pick up partisans in Yugoslavia. Eaton was based in Italy for 14 months during his time as an Air Force navigator. In total, he completed 68 combat missions in two and a half years of service, serving in both the 12<sup>th</sup> Air Force and the 15<sup>th</sup> Air

Force. Towards the end of 1944, Eaton was awarded a Purple Heart medal and an Air Medal with five Oak Leaf clusters. In addition to these awards, Eaton earned a European-African-Middle Eastern Theatre ribbon with five Battle Stars for Air Combat campaigns in the Balkans, Rome-Arno, North Apennines, Po Valley, and Southern France. Upon his departure from active duty in the Air Force in December 1945, Eaton had the rank of First Lieutenant of the Air Corps. He remained in the Officers' Reserve Corps with a promotion to Captain in December 1946. After his service, Eaton received a Bachelor of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering from North Dakota State University. While in college, he married his high school sweetheart, Joyce Coleman, on August 24, 1947. Eaton worked for General Electric Company for 36 years in New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Minnesota, retiring in 1985. He passed away on March 1, 2006 at St. Mary's Medical Center in Duluth, MN.

*Scope and Content:* The James Eaton papers includes military records and paperwork, travel receipts, and correspondence, photographs, postcards, and various ephemera. The strength of the collection is found with the military records as they provide an insight as to his whereabouts and level of involvement with the Air Force during World War II. These series give a historical overview of James Eaton's military career and what he valued most during his service.

The *correspondence* series ranges from 1943 – 1945 and includes correspondence from James Eaton to his parents, his Pastor in Fargo to servicemen, and Captain W.M. Clark to Eaton.

*Subjects:*

- World War II
- Army Air Forces
- European Theater of Operations
- B-24 liberators

Folder # Description

**Record Box Series**

**BOX 1**

**Childhood**

1 Military Papers (1943)

2 Military Papers (Jan. – June 1944)

3 Military Papers (July – Dec. 1944)

4 Military Papers (1945)

5 Military Papers (1946 – 1952)

6 Misc. Military Papers (no dates)

7 German Papers & Correspondence (1942 – 1945) 8 Correspondence (1943 –

1945) 9 Postcards & Newsletters

10 Ephemera