

## EAST FISHKILL HOMETOWN HERO

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# Owen Cottle

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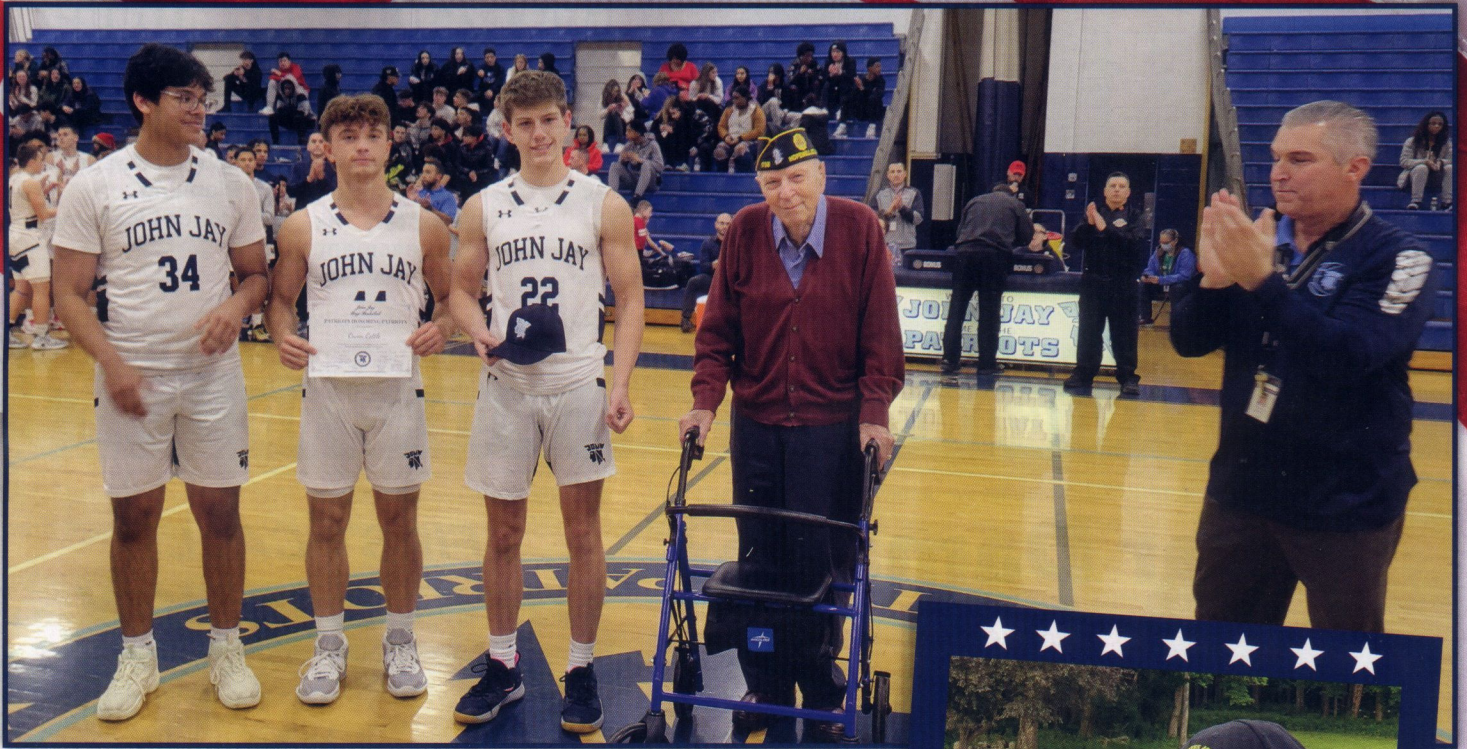


Every so often, World War II Veteran Owen Cottle glances over at his B-26 Marauder model airplane, a gift from his son, and is transported back to his days of service. An Aircraft Armorer for the U.S. Army Air Corps, the Private First Class loaded bombs onto planes, prepared them for takeoff and refilled them with 50-caliber ammunition upon their return.

His days were a big change from those at Penn State University, where the Connecticut native was studying chemical engineering when he was



Owen Cottle was an Aircraft Armorer for the U.S. Army Air Corps during WWII.



A longtime member of Manny Bacon American Legion Post 1758, Mr. Cottle was recently honored by the John Jay High School boys' basketball team.

drafted in February 1943. After a month of basic training in Miami, Owen was sent by train to bases in Denver and Salt Lake City to learn machine-gun and bomb-dropping operations for B-17, B-24 and B-26 aircraft.

On a base in Clovis, N.M., he had his first airplane ride, a cold nighttime practice run. He still remembers how frigid it was sitting in the back of the open plane, listening to the roar of the engine and feeling surprised by the pilot's instruction to "jump out and use the parachute" in case of emergency. "I hadn't been taught how to use it!"

After eight days on a ship crossing the rough Atlantic from Boston to Scotland, Owen was assigned to the 387th Bombardment Group, Ninth Air Force in England. Loading bombs and cleaning machine guns on planes with missions to destroy Nazi convoys, railroads and airfields "was hard work," Owen states, but the infantry and engineers had the hardest jobs. "They were the ones shot at and killed."

On June 6, 1944, the planes Owen helped prepare for battle flew three missions instead of one, as more than 160,000 Allied troops landed along a 50-mile stretch of the Normandy coast in Nazi-occupied France. By the end of that day, known as D-Day, the Allies had secured a position in continental Europe.

The war ended the following year, and Owen was honorably discharged on Oct. 2, 1945. He returned to Penn State but found no available housing and decided chemical engineering wasn't for him anyway. He earned a bachelor's degree in accounting at Pace University at night while working days as a clerk in the treasury department of American Brake Shoe Company in Manhattan. He eventually became the company's treasurer until his retirement in 1985.

But his first mission upon returning to the U.S. was to find Florence, the young woman with whom he had been exchanging letters after she and her friends had decided to each write to an overseas soldier. The couple married in 1946 and raised their four children in Yonkers.



The 99-year-old is pictured with the late Betty Cottle, his wife of 61 years.

Owen became a single father when he lost Florence, who was only 37, to cancer.

Owen says "a miracle happened" when he found love again with Betty. The couple married in 1960 and had two more children. After living in Westchester for 25 years, they downsized to a home in Stormville, where they lived another 25 years. Betty passed away last July, also from cancer. Her memory lives on in the six children, 12 grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

This November, Owen will celebrate his 100th birthday. Reflecting on his service, he humbly says: "Veterans in combat and who lived in horrible conditions, not guys like me, are the real heroes." We thank all of them, and Owen, for their service. ♦