

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
KENNETH W. GEISHIRT
Mechanic and Tail Gunner, Army Air Corps, World War II
2001

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Geishirt, Kenneth W., (1921-). Oral History Interview, 2001.

Master Copy: 1 video recording (53 min.); ½ inch, color.

User Copy: 1 audio cassette (ca. 70 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract:

Kenneth Geishirt, a Madison native, talks about his time as a mechanic and B-17 gunner in the Pacific Theater of WWII. He remembers that he joined the U.S. Army Air Force in 1939 and was sent to Chanute field where he learned how to be an aircraft mechanic. Geishirt recalls how he arrived in Honolulu on December 23, 1941 and his first duty was picking up shrapnel from the Attack on Pearl Harbor off of a runway. Geishirt recalls how he volunteered for combat duty after assisting in maintaining B-17s for a short period of time, despite never attending gunnery school. Geishirt states that “My gunnery school was Guadalcanal. You learn fast.” Geishirt recalls that he was assigned to the 42nd Bombardment Squadron of the 11th Bombardment Group. Geishirt states that he was assigned to Kualoa where he flew sea patrols that were about 1,100 miles round trip and lasted all day. He recalls that he missed the Battle of Midway due to technical difficulties with his aircraft and in November 1942 how his squadron went to New Caledonia but he operated out of Espiritu Santo. Geishirt talks about how he worked as an aerial engineer and tail gunner and how he bombed Guadalcanal, Munda, and Tulagi. He recalls how his squadron operated in flights of three planes and that they mostly dropped 300 pound bombs. Geishirt describes how he engaged an enemy fighter with his tail gun and shot him down and in the same flight a Japanese fighter rammed a friendly B-17 and destroyed it. He talks about how he was grounded shortly after this incident because he was so shook up that he couldn’t stop his hands from shaking. Geishirt recalls how he was knocked unconscious after his B-17 was hit on a different mission and there was a hole in the wing large enough that a person’s head and shoulders could fit through. He remembers that after his plane was hit his plane was grounded from flying combat missions and instead they flew officers around. Geishirt states that the people in his B-17 were given a month’s leave in Australia as well after being hit. He describes his R&R in Australia and mentions that he and his fellow airmen spend most of their time drinking. Geishirt talks about the medication he was given to help with his combat stress. He states that his unit was given new B-24s and that he was made a technical supply sergeant and worked in Funi Futi, Hawaii, and Guam. Geishirt recalls that he went back to Hawaii and then to Fort Sheridan where he was discharged

Biographical Sketch:

Kenneth Geishirt was born in Madison on March 9th 1921 and served in the Army Air Corps in the Pacific Theater of WWII. He worked as an electrician in Madison after being discharged.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2001.
Transcribed by Dan Hudson, 2010.
Corrected by Channing Welch, 2010.
Corrections typed in by Michelle Marion, 2010.

Interview Transcript:

Geishirt: I had written a schematic of everything what I went through—because I ain't got much left. I had quite the time getting my eligibility for the VA.

McIntosh: Okay, well, I'll use this if we need to. Where's that sheet I sent you? There's the envelope, but I don't see the sheet?

Geishirt: It must be in there some place. I started to write it but then when figured I got some of the things that I was gonna start writing. Maybe it'd be better if I just gave ya a sheet of it. I've been around. [laughs]

McIntosh: That's good. All right, so you don't have that thing I sent you then?

Geishirt: I must have it some place.

McIntosh: I would think so, but I don't see it.

Geishirt: This looks like a newer piece of paper.

McIntosh: There we go.

Geishirt: Yeah, that's what I got started. Then I—

McIntosh: Now, I see. Yeah, it doesn't really help. You're right [laughs].

Geishirt: Huh?

McIntosh: You're right. It doesn't help because we didn't use this. Okay, Ken

Geishirt: I figured you could take what you wanted.

McIntosh: Right, you're right. Talkin' to Ken Geishirt. Now, Ken Geishirt was born when?

Geishirt: March 9th, 1921

McIntosh: Where was that Ken?

Geishirt: In Madison.

McIntosh: In Madison. And what were you doing before World War II?

Geishirt: Oh, let's see. I was in the Army Air Force.

McIntosh: When did you join the Air Force?

Geishirt: I joined it in, let's see, '39 or '40.

McIntosh: What prompted you to join, to get in the service at that time?

Geishirt: Well, I wanted to get in the aircraft part of it. My friend, my dad was with Pan American Airways. And I was always interested in aircraft so he says, "Well," he says, "They got about the best mechanic school you got. Why don't you go in there?" I couldn't find a job so I used to go down to Rockford and stand in line at three o'clock in the morning trying to get work and couldn't get any.

McIntosh: Jeepers.

Geishirt: So I went in the Air Force.

McIntosh: Did you just write them a letter, or did you go down to the recruiting office?

Geishirt: I went down to Milwaukee and enlisted.

McIntosh: Just at a recruiting office and you just walked in and signed up.

Geishirt: Yeah, I was in the Regular Army.

McIntosh: Yes, I understand because that was part of the Army in those days. It wasn't a separate deal.

Geishirt: That was a little different; you got paid ahead of the rest of the guys. They used to get mad [laughs] I was the first guy paid.

McIntosh: Because?

Geishirt: I was in the Regular Army.

McIntosh: Did you sign up for a number of years?

Geishirt: Yeah, I signed up for a number of years.

McIntosh: How long was it?

Geishirt: Well, I signed up for three years, but I ended up with five.

McIntosh: I understand. So you're signed up then, where did they send you to school?

Geishirt: Well, they sent me down to Jefferson Barracks [Lemay, Missouri]. That was in the winter time, November.

McIntosh: November of 1940?

Geishirt: Let's see, that must have been '39 because at '40, yeah, I was sent up to Chanute Field [Rantoul, Illinois].

McIntosh: What did they do down in Jefferson Barracks, just basic training?

Geishirt: Well, they had us puttin' up tents, and that's where I got the rheumatic fever. We were living in tents all winter. They gave me a twelve pound maul, and they says "You go drive the stakes in the ground." Well, heck, it rained that day, and I went and stuck them in. That night it froze, and boy, oh boy, it was cold.

McIntosh: That's got nothing to do with airplanes.

Geishirt: Nope, that wasn't until I got up—in January they sent me up to Chanute Field. They put me in the hospital for a week down there. I had some virus or something, and I think that's when my rheumatic fever started.

McIntosh: Did they diagnosis you with having rheumatic fever then, or did that come later?

Geishirt: No—

McIntosh: Because they usually put you in bed for a long time in those days.

Geishirt: Yeah, well, when we got sent up to Chanute Field, that's when I was in for six weeks, in and out in and out.

McIntosh: Right, so you still hadn't had any training.

Geishirt: Nope [laughs]. Well, when I got up to Chanute then I started AM classes. Then I specialized in aircraft ignition and wiring, and after I graduated I spent an extra two weeks in that.

McIntosh: When you finished that you are listed as what, an Air Force mechanic or an engine mechanic, or how or what did they describe that job?

Geishirt: As an engineering or I could do aircraft engineering, engineering on flying, transferring fuel, such things and that, so.

McIntosh: And they gave you a rating of what, a corporal?

Geishirt: Buck private. We didn't get ratings. I had, I got an award that I'm a corporal. [laughs] You see, the Regular Army you got awards. In order to lose it you would be court-martialed. They didn't have it that you could get it like that. That's where I run in to trouble, when I got grounded from flying. See, I had never gone to gunnery school. My gunnery school was Guadalcanal. You learn fast.

McIntosh: So tell me about your training as mechanic?

Geishirt: Like what? Through (??) the whole course?

McIntosh: What did that involve specifically?

Geishirt: Structures, engines—

McIntosh: I mean, how to repair them?

Geishirt: Yeah, engines, hydraulic systems, electrical systems.

McIntosh: You dealt with the engines also?

Geishirt: Yeah, we'd test block them. Took 'em out in test blocks and run them up, and checked them and find out what's wrong with them and everything.

McIntosh: Was it a difficult course for you?

Geishirt: No, I was always quite mechanically in mind.

McIntosh: Came pretty easy then.

Geishirt: Yeah.

McIntosh: And it lasted how long again?

Geishirt: Well, I got out of that in October, I think it was when I graduated from Chanute. And I was scheduled to go to Hawaii.

McIntosh: So the school lasted how long?

Geishirt: Well, oh, nine months or eight months.

McIntosh: Nine months? Wow!

Geishirt: Well, I was in the hospital for—

McIntosh: Yeah, that's right. So, not quite nine months then.

Geishirt: Yeah.

McIntosh: So after you got out of that school rated as a sergeant, what did they do with ya?

Geishirt: They didn't give me a rating. I didn't have a rating, I was a buck private yet. Then they sent me to Hawaii as—gonna be as an instructor. Then I would have got a staff or a tech sergeants rating. But I got to Hawaii, and I got off of the ship and took a bus, and I went out to Hickam Field. They says, "Sorry, Ken. You ain't got no more school." So they says, "You're going on the line." So I went to the 42nd Bomb Squadron.

McIntosh: 42nd?

Geishirt: That was with the 11th Bomb Group. Have you ever seen our video?

McIntosh: No, where would I have seen that?

Geishirt: Well I brought it up here.

McIntosh: Did ya?

Geishirt: Yeah.

McIntosh: Yeah, but they have that down—I don't ever get into the archives. Tell me, when was this that you arrived in Hawaii? What month of what year?

Geishirt: I got in Honolulu December 23rd of 1941.

McIntosh: It was after the war started then?

Geishirt: Yup, I was in San Francisco December 7th. I was scheduled to load, and then they got—

McIntosh: Did the Pearl Harbor attack surprise you?

Geishirt: Well, yes, it surprised me, but we knew something was gonna happen. I mean the way they were moving guys around.

McIntosh: Your first duty on Hawaii, what did that involve?

Geishirt: Picking shrapnel off the runway at Hickam Field.

McIntosh: [laughs] That's got nothin' to do with airplane engines.

Geishirt: No. They lined us up in a row, and we had to go down and pick every piece of shrapnel. See, because every time a plane landed and there was shrapnel it'd cut the tires.

McIntosh: They couldn't sweep that off?

Geishirt: I don't know why they didn't. You'd find chunks; they were from little pieces to big pieces. We walked shoulder to shoulder the whole length of the runways and picked them up.

McIntosh: You spent several days doing that?

Geishirt: Yeah, that was the first job. Then--

McIntosh: Something else you weren't trained for [laughs].

Geishirt: No. But then they wanted me to go to communication school. I says, "Listen, I just finished a school." Just then the line chief come in. He says, "Listen, if he's a mechanic I want him down on the line." So then I went down on the line.

McIntosh: Into aircraft maintenance?

Geishirt: Yup.

McIntosh: Any particular airplane?

Geishirt: It was the B-17's. We had a couple of them there.

McIntosh: You specialized in the bombers?

Geishirt: Yeah.

McIntosh: Was that difficult work?

Geishirt: No, we had the basics of radial engines, and that was-- everything else was the same.

McIntosh: Did you tear them down, or did you just repair whatever particular problem there was?

Geishirt: Well, we did our inspections. See, every day we had a preflight inspection. We to go up, preflight them, see what the compression was on the engines.

McIntosh: Oh, you would run them up yourself?

Geishirt: Yeah.

McIntosh: Sit in the pilot's cockpit and turn on each engine?

Geishirt: Yeah, and start them up and check them and see how they go through the sequences, see if the props would change pitch.

McIntosh: Make sure everything was working properly before— how long would that take for one airplane?

Geishirt: Oh, it didn't take very long.

McIntosh: Half hour?

Geishirt: Then we had to drain the sumps. Ya see, when it was starting we didn't know what the score was, but we knew something was up because we had an officer in our squadron that was an FBI man. We knew something was going on some place. You see, when you check the engines you drain the oil sump. Then you'd look for filings or something in the oil silt. Well, by the time we left Hawaii to go down under we never did find out what was happening. We was having trouble with engines going out on us. When we come back we found out that there was a German that had been in Hawaii for ten years and worked at Hawaiian Air Depot. What he'd do, he was the final inspector. He'd take off the plate and hang a Bull Durham [tobacco] sack of iron filings on the shaft and gradually, in time, boom.

McIntosh: Did they ever run that guy down?

Geishirt: Yeah, they run him down. I don't know what ever happened to him.

McIntosh: Where was he? In Hawaii?

Geishirt: Yeah, he was in Hawaiian Air Depot.

McIntosh: He was a civilian?

Geishirt: Yup.

McIntosh: So you did this for how long in Hawaii before you moved on?

Geishirt: Well, let's see, I think the second of February or something. Then I went on as a—see, we didn't have no gunnery schools then. We didn't have no gunnery, I mean there. So then they asked for volunteers to volunteer as combat members. So then I volunteered, and then I was put on as a volunteer with Frank Pareto (?). They says, "Well, we'll give you

gunnery school.” So we went down to the ash pit and shot at tin cans with our ‘45’s. We couldn’t hit nothing with’em [laughs]. So then we got all done, and the pilot, he picked up a rock and threw it at the can and knocked it over [both laugh]. So the next day we got out to the plane before we took off for flight and we set a box of rocks under his seat [both laugh].

McIntosh: So where did you go from there, from Hawaii?

Geishirt: From Hawaii—ah, let’s see. Well, first we went down to Midway. Well, we moved over to Kualoa, and then from Kualoa we was flying sea patrols in and out of Kualoa.

McIntosh: What was your job?

Geishirt: Just mechanic— or tail gunner.

McIntosh: You weren’t flying then?

Geishirt: Yeah, I was flying. We was flying as a complete combat group.

McIntosh: What was your job in the airplane?

Geishirt: Sit by the side window and look for—

McIntosh: Weren’t you a side gunner?

Geishirt: Well, yeah, I’d been a side gunner. Otherwise I’d went back in the tail, see? But otherwise when we went on sea patrol then I’d sit by the side window always. See, and then we’d look, scan out at the water. Everything was open then. That’s [laughs]— we didn’t have no ear guards or anything like that.

McIntosh: And how long would those patrols last generally?

Geishirt: Well, we’d fly out 500 miles out, swing over a 100 miles, then come back 500. So it was 1,100 miles we flew.

McIntosh: That would take you about four hours?

Geishirt: Oh, no. That took us just about all day.

McIntosh: Eight hours?

Geishirt: Yeah, but see, they cruised at about 150 miles an hour, 160 in the B-17s. Well, our bombing raids, our first bombing raids that we had-- let’s see,

Midway we didn't go out on a bombing raid because we had an old B-17C. That didn't have any tail guns. That was one of the-- come back right straight down to the tail. It didn't have no hook on it like that. We had that attached to the squadron. So they wanted every airplane in the air, and we always had a lot of trouble with that thing. That's one reason I'm still alive because we took our pilot, we took off in that old B-17C and flew down to Midway, and we landed, but on the way down the superchargers went out with hydraulic problems. We always had trouble on that plane. So we landed and everything, and so the pilot says, "Well, I won't go to the meeting for tonight." We didn't know what was actually going on, see? So they says, "Well, what you do, you wait for us to take off. Then after we take off then you take off and go back to Hawaii." See? So we waited for them to take off, and the rest of the squadrons took off. Then we took off. I was sitting by the side window looking back, and all at once I says, "Boy, somethin's wrong. All hell is breaking loose back there." I could see tracers and puffs and booms, you know, bombs droppin'. I went up, and I told the pilot, I said, "Hey! Something's coming off back there." Just then the radio operator, he come up, "Midway's attacked." Here we were, we could still see it ya know? The pilot says, "God," he says, "I don't know where the fleet is," he says. So he says, "Well, we'll put her down," and we put her right on the deck. We couldn't get over 8,000 feet, see, without the superchargers. So we went down; we scooted for Hawaii.

McIntosh: So you left Midway just before the most important battle of the entire Pacific War? Ha!

Geishirt: Yeah, and I left it, but I think my God, if they'd caught us sitting there at Midway—

McIntosh: You would have been an easy target.

Geishirt: Oh, I wouldn't be here today.

McIntosh: Probably not.

Geishirt: No—I've had some—I went to church on Sunday, and the minister was talkin' about you had an archangel or somethin' with ya [laughs]. I says I must have had a lot of them.

McIntosh: Well, that's good. Did your duty change after this?

Geishirt: Well, then we got B-17s. We got all newer ones, and then we got lined up to go to—oh, let's see? Where did we go after that? We went down to New Caledonia. While at New Caledonia the squadron was stationed at New Caledonia, but we was operating out of Espiritu Santo.

McIntosh: Yes, I see that here.

Geishirt: Yeah, see, the ground—

McIntosh: You were there in November of '42?

Geishirt: Yeah. I guess them are the dates.

McIntosh: And what were your duties then? Were you bombing any place in particular?

Geishirt: Then I was always the aerial engineer checkin' everything on the flight. See, we had two of us. The first engineer, he was the top turret gunner, and I was the tail gunner.

McIntosh: Oh, you became a tail gunner then.

Geishirt: Yeah.

McIntosh: You got a plane with a tail gun? [laughs]

Geishirt: Yeah. So then I was tail gunner. So otherwise we'd fly down to the target, and then I'd go back to the tail.

McIntosh: What was your usual target, Ken?

Geishirt: Well, let's see. The usual—

McIntosh: From New Caledonia or Espiritu Santo?

Geishirt: Then it was Guadalcanal, Munda, Tulagi, and I can't remember the names—

McIntosh: If you were going to bomb Tulagi, did you go in a large group?

Geishirt: It always flights of three. [Brig. Gen.] "Blondie" [LaVerne] Saunders was our commanding officer. We was always, he wanted to keep three airplanes over the target all during daylight hours. We'd come in, and then the others would come out.

McIntosh: You were dropping 500 pound bombs?

Geishirt: Well, anywhere from 300 to 500, mostly 300's. The Navy didn't want us to do too much damage.

McIntosh: Did you meet any Japanese airplane opposition?

Geishirt: Yeah, we met ‘em. [laughs]

McIntosh: Did you have the chance to shoot at any of them?

Geishirt: Yup.

McIntosh: Did we hit anything?

Geishirt: Well, I know for sure I hit one because I was sitting there, and they says, “Plane at 1 o’clock high,” and I could see the tracers coming.

McIntosh: Coming in from your side from the back so you could get ‘em with your rear gun?

Geishirt: Yeah, see, ‘cause I couldn’t see too much of what’s going on.

McIntosh: Only backwards.

Geishirt: Yeah, and so I kept watching it, and the tracers kept coming down. So I sat there, and I put the guns way down. See, they were just-- I wasn’t in a turret. I just had up, down—

McIntosh: You did this sitting; you were in a sitting position?

Geishirt: I was sitting on a bicycle seat between the ammunition, and so I sat there, and I just went that, and just as soon as I saw him—we didn’t use a sight. As soon as I saw him I started bursting; I just raised them up.

McIntosh: Right into his path.

Geishirt: Yeah, and I thought, “God, did I miss that guy?” I knew he flew through it. All at once way out in the distance I could see the bottom of his float started peeling up, and it flew off. So I knew I hit him, and he was sitting right above it. So then I figured, “Well, I must have hit him because he kept going up in a circle.” And there was another flight—we had completed our bombing run, and there was another flight of three coming in from the 26th, and I watched him, and we were going out and then got distracted by something else. All at once I was going around, and all at once here come their B-17. He jumped on them, and they say they shagged him off, ya know, and all at once this B-17, he must have hit that B-17 they said because he broke formation. I mean we didn’t know because we all kept radio silence. All at once I looked, here come this B-17. It was just like he was floating across in front of us, behind us, ya

know. Then the next thing I knew, zoom, here come that—he was kamikaze, and he dove right into him.

McIntosh: Rammed him?

Geishirt: Right in the center.

McIntosh: So the whole thing exploded and the plane (??) went down in a heap.

Geishirt: Yeah, it just—

McIntosh: Oh, my!

Geishirt: It just happened so fast.

McIntosh: That must have surprised your—

Geishirt: [laughs] I couldn't stop anything.

McIntosh: That was pretty bad.

Geishirt: A week or two later, then I had to get grounded. I couldn't hold my hands still.

McIntosh: That shook you up so much?

Geishirt: Well, ya see I had flown eight months, and we had sea patrols— when we weren't bombing we were sea patrolling. So we were in the air all the time.

McIntosh: So how many missions did you have in total?

Geishirt: Well, I got an Airman's Medal with over a 103 combat hours.

McIntosh: How many missions are you talking about?

Geishirt: We never worried about that.

McIntosh: Oh, you never counted 'em?

Geishirt: No, [laughs] we never knew. All I know is that in August 4th, 5th they got bomb things written out where we had been over a different island. See, we had to load our own bombs and that stuff. See, our crews was down at New Caledonia yet, and we had to do everything by ourselves up there. We had to do our inspections.

McIntosh: Where? On Espiritu Santo, are you speaking?

Geishirt: Yeah, on Espiritu Santo, see, because that small island, it was a couple of squadrons on it (??).

McIntosh: That's all they could hold?

Geishirt: Yeah, and so that's the way it was them days, and we didn't—you kept going until you couldn't.

McIntosh: So was that your only experience with a Jap Zero?

Geishirt: No, I had another one. I looked out the side window and here he come. It was just a solid sheet of flames across there—wings. Only he was undershooting us. If he'd just pulled back that stick he'd cut us right in half, but he was just going under us. And so he missed us, and he went down, and he come around behind. But neither the side gunner or I shot at him. See, the side gunner mustn't have—I don't know how come he didn't see him. So we watched, and he went down around, he come back, he come up. I didn't shoot at him. So I called up the side gunner. I says, "Let that son of a bitch come." [laughs] So we let him come, and we poured the coals to him. See, our range we could—see they told us, "You guys ain't out there to be aces. We just want you to keep them away from us. So don't let them get in too close." [laughs] So that one when I last saw him he was smoking and going down, so I don't know. Then there was another one, he missed us, too. So if they missed us and come back at the tail, we didn't miss them the second time around.

McIntosh: You were ready for 'em then.

Geishirt: Yeah, so—yup.

McIntosh: Did you ever encounter much ground fire? The anti-aircraft—

Geishirt: A lot of ack-ack [anti-aircraft fire].

McIntosh: They could reach your plane? You were flying low enough so they could reach you?

Geishirt: No—well, I don't know. Why, I imagine they could reach us because the ack-ack mostly went down in behind us.

McIntosh: Yeah, see that's what I think mostly you flew above that I think.

Geishirt: We'd bomb at anywhere from 15 to 18,000 feet.

McIntosh: I don't think that they had the—the Germans could shoot higher, but I don't think the Japanese could get up that high that early in the war.

Geishirt: Yeah, I don't think so. I don't know, but I'll tell you a good one, just to show you how great we are. The first raid we went we were supposed to get a power house at a dam on a river on Guadalcanal. The pilot told the bombardier, he said, "Now, don't drop unless you're sure of your target. So we come in, and we went around—oops, he didn't drop it. Cloud or something drifted across, so we turned around, we come back in, started out again, he didn't drop. So I don't know what happened. I called up the pilot, I says, "Hey, listen," I says, "that damn ack-ack is getting closer." [both laugh] He says, "Oh my God," he says, "I forgot all about it." So then he told the bombardier, he says, "Drop it." So after that, every first run, zoom, boom, it was gone [laughs]. **[End of Tape 1, Side A]** But then, oh, the one we got hit by, I don't know if it was a fighter or if it was a 27 millimeter. But we was on a bombing run, and all of a sudden I come to, and I was laying on the floor of the catwalk, see, because I wasn't strapped in.

McIntosh: You weren't a tail gunner then?

Geishirt: Yeah, I was back there in the tail; see, my head was up in that little canopy.

McIntosh: Right.

Geishirt: And so the next thing I knew I was laying down on the floor, and the plane was shaking and rattling.

McIntosh: Something knocked you unconscious?

Geishirt: Well, yeah. Ya see, back there in the tail any reaction is like cracking the whip, and I went and I grabbed the speaker, and I went, "Pilot, tail gunner: are you there? Are you there?" He says, "Well, come on up here and take a look at this." So I went up and looked. The top of our left wing looked like a sieve up there. He says, "What do ya think?" "It's still hanging together, ain't it?" He says, "Yup." I says, "Well, that's about—"

McIntosh: It took the skin off of the wing?

Geishirt: No, just all pinholes, looked just like the bottom of a sieve, you know where they poke the holes through it. And I says, "Just keep going." So we went back, and we landed. We got out, and we looked at it, and on the bottom side you could stick you head and shoulders up in there, and we had the main spar, it blew a hole through the main spar. And the rest went out up there.

McIntosh: I'm surprised the rest of that could hold that wing together.

Geishirt: Well, that old B-17 was built, and you could really take a beating.

McIntosh: So, you never did get knocked down then?

Geishirt: Nope, no.

McIntosh: But that was the toughest that it was hit?

Geishirt: It was hit, yeah.

McIntosh: Did they turn that plane in and give you another one?

Geishirt: No, they grounded us for flying combat missions. And we had to ferry brass around the islands and that stuff. They says, the crew that "Blondie" Saunders, our commanding general, said—see we had volunteered that day. He had come around on the line asking for one more plane. We were supposed to go down to the [unintelligible] that day, and he was short one plane of a flight of three. So he says—come around and asks us guys if we'd go. So, yeah, we was stupid enough [laughs], so we went along. We got hit, he says "You're the guys to take that plane to Australia."

McIntosh: So you had a little R&R in Australia? How long?

Geishirt: A month.

McIntosh: A month? Hey, that's nice.

Geishirt: Yeah, three weeks they billeted us in a hotel, and we got sick of that. So we went out and rented a brand new apartment house, completely furnished, dishes and everything. And we lived in that for—

McIntosh: Was—is this in Melbourne or Sydney?

Geishirt: In Melbourne. Sydney, we stayed overnight in a hotel. Brisbane, we stayed in houses, private homes, and they billeted us down there. When we first flew over Australia we got lost. [laughs] The pilot called up navigator, "Hey, bud start navigating" He says he couldn't fly according to the maps. Well, all that red dust, ya know, it's wild country down there.

McIntosh: What did you do for entertainment in Melbourne?

Geishirt: Drank mostly.

McIntosh: Just drank, they didn't have any shows or anything to go to? No dances? Australian girls?

Geishirt: Yeah, they had dances [laughs].

McIntosh: Meet some nice Australian girls?

Geishirt: Yeah, we met some nice—

McIntosh: You could charm them [laughs]?

Geishirt: Yeah. So we went down there, we went there on a train. They took us down there, and we flew it in down there, and then they brought us out, and the plane was at Melbourne. And you know they didn't have regular landing fields down there. They had everything in pastures it felt like, and so we was out there taking off, and the pilot forgot—well, the pilot told the copilot he could fly it. So he flew it, but he forgot to lock the tail wheel. [laughs] We went around in a big circle. [both laugh] Then we got straightened out, and we had our engineer—they poured him back on the airplane. So we got on line, and I was up there in the cockpit then, and we took off, and I knew we was getting awful close. We had a couple of fighter pilots on and their stuff, and then we had some stones and that stuff we was takin' back, and I could see that fence at the end was getting close. The pilot wasn't doing anything so I knew I could feel the plane starting to get lift. So I knew now was the time, and so I just pulled up the wheels. We just got over the fences. Although it could have been closer than what I thought, too, but all I know is we got over it. [laughs] And then one of the other things I saw was, we was on this unscheduled flight, you know, because we was never scheduled, see, because we just flew brass here, and there, and there, and we was coming back, and all of a sudden here come a bunch of these naval fighters.

McIntosh: What kind?

Geishirt: They were Navy single seat fighters.

McIntosh: You mean the American?

Geishirt: Yeah.

McIntosh: Oh, F4Fs.

Geishirt: Yeah, well I don't know. I used to love that airplane, it was that little small, Beloit radial engine. I don't know if it was a FA or what it was. It had enlisted men flying them in them days. All at once we broke out in the clear, and everybody was signaling, here the whole fleet was below us,

three aircraft carriers, and they were zooming around and that. Well, they signaled so we just pulled up and away. When we landed in New Caledonia the MP's were waiting for us [laughs] at the end of the runway.

McIntosh: The Navy complained about ya?

Geishirt: Yup, they says, "What you saw, forget." That was it. Two days later I guess the Coral Sea Battle took off.

McIntosh: The Coral Sea? That was before Midway.

Geishirt: The Coral Sea?

McIntosh: Yeah, see, that was before Midway. Must have been another battle. This is after your Midway experience.

Geishirt: Well, I don't remember. Well, anyway—

McIntosh: Right. Anyway, they didn't want you talkin' about it.

Geishirt: You see because Halloween time we was down at Espiritu then.

McIntosh: Yeah, you were too far west.

Geishirt: But anyway, they said, "Just forget about it." [James laughs] But anyway that was that. Then another mission we were on sea patrol. We went out, and we come back, we landed. This was after we got shot up. They asked us, "Hey, did you guys see anything?" We said, "Nope." See, then we used to go down and buzz these islands, see if we saw anything different, you know? That's what we did when we weren't bombing. We were spotting these smaller islands around there. We knew this Jap was building a runway right around the trees. Then they figured they were gonna cut the trees down. So we would go and bomb it before they go— [laughs]. So anyway we landed and got out, "See anything?" "No, we didn't see nothing." "Somebody saw you." So we had a row of holes in one wing, but it was small caliber, ya know?

McIntosh: Somebody with a rifle.

Geishirt: Well, it must have been a machine gun because it was a perfectly straight line. And the darn rubber tanks the next morning started leaking. You know, we just had those self-sealers, but they didn't last forever, ya know? So the next morning sure enough there was a puddle of gas out there. So they says, "No, we can't do that." So we had to take everything out of the airplane and took the guns out, took all the weight off, and we took it off the ground with two engines. There was just no crew on it then, and we

flew up to another island and they replaced it, tank. Well, I had enough to last [laughs].

McIntosh: Right. You had a great experience then.

Geishirt: Oh, yeah, because then after I got grounded the flight surgeon said, “Kid, you’ve had it.”

McIntosh: Why were you grounded?

Geishirt: Because I couldn’t hold my hands still. See, they didn’t know anything about combat fatigue those days.

McIntosh: Was this after the Midway experience your talking about? Is that when you were grounded or later?

Geishirt: No, this is after we had come back from down under.

McIntosh: You mean after your rest?

Geishirt: Espiritu Santo, we were still down there at sea patrol and everything. So then I come out, and I says, “Well, the flight surgeon he says, no, he says we can’t let you fly anymore until you get a replacement.” So they put me on this codeine, coke, and I was on that for a couple of weeks. And then they got somebody to take my place.

McIntosh: What kind of medicine did they give you?

Geishirt: Codeine, coke.

McIntosh: For what kind of pain?

Geishirt: It wasn’t pain, it was just to smooth me out I guess.

McIntosh: I see.

Geishirt: In fact, I’m taking it now because for what I got I was taking Tylenol—well, you probably know about this stuff. Tylenol, well, acetaminophen (?), I was taking acetaminophen (?) and hydrocodone out at the hospital. So then they took a picture of my stomach, and it was starting to eat the esophagus up so they put me on codeine now. Its aciniphades with codeine. So that’s what I’m on now.

McIntosh: So after you finished, how many hours did you say you had flying out there?

Geishirt: Well, I had eight months flying. But actually I had over a 103 combat hours.

McIntosh: So when they took you off flying status, did you go home?

Geishirt: No, I went back on the line.

McIntosh: You mean mechanical repairs again?

Geishirt: Yup.

McIntosh: Like you originally started doing?

Geishirt: Yeah. So then—

McIntosh: Did you stay out there in New Caledonia, or did they move you back to Hawaii?

Geishirt: No, I—they moved the whole squadron back; the whole squadron got moved back. So then they says, “Okay, now youse guys we need a couple hundred men to form the nucleus of a new group.” So 210 of us, I guess, stayed with it, and they sent us back, gave us furloughs, then we went right back out to the same squadrons, and then we got all new B-24s.

McIntosh: 24s? No more 17s?

Geishirt: No more 17s, then we had all B-24s. That’s when they made me technical supply sergeant, see, because they said, “Well, you know combat, you know photo sections, you know everything else about that damn airplane, what you need down there in parts.” So they made me tech supply sergeant. So then what we did is we trained these crews. Then we’d load up everything, and then we’d go down under again. Then, let’s see, where did we go next? [laughs] [Approx. 5 sec. pause in recording]. We went to Funi Futi. Yup, that was—then we went down to Funi Futi, and we operated out of there. Then after we got everything smoothed out of there they pulled us back to Hawaii at Mokalalaia [Airfield]. We got all new crews and airplanes again. See, that’s why I couldn’t get above a staff sergeant because all these new guys come in were tech sergeants. I didn’t have a snow ball’s chance—

McIntosh: No room for you.

Geishirt: Nope, and so then after that got stayed (??) over it was at Mokalalaia, then we went down to—ah, Guam, later after, but they always sent us back to Hawaii. We trained the crews back in Hawaii. But we always got new crews and new airplanes, and like me, I couldn’t see taking all that

material back so I would just leave it down there. I'd go to the Hawaiian Air Depot, and they'd say, "You again, huh?" "Yup." "Well, you got the slip?" I says, "Yup, lost it in action." [laughs] Okay, they give me a complete squadron. What the heck was the sense of us lugging stuff all over the ocean down there.

McIntosh: It looks like you were in Guam almost a year. From September of '44 to July of '45, when you went to Okinawa.

Geishirt: Well, that's when I left 'em .

McIntosh: That's when you left them, yeah.

Geishirt: You see they come out with that percentage deal, ya know? See, the war in Europe had ended, and then you got certain percentage.

McIntosh: Points?

Geishirt: Yeah, yeah, points.

McIntosh: What did you do in Okinawa?

Geishirt: I didn't go to Okinawa.

McIntosh: Oh, it says Okinawa.

Geishirt: Well, that's where the 42nd went.

McIntosh: Oh, I see, okay. You went home then from Guam?

Geishirt: I went to Hawaii, and I worked there at the Hawaiian Air Depot for a while.

McIntosh: 'Til the end of the war?

Geishirt: Well, no, I don't think it was at the end of the war—just about.

McIntosh: But anyway, from Hawaii you came home and were discharged then.

Geishirt: Yeah, I come in at Fort Sheridan, and the girl looked at me, and she says, "Cripes," she says, "You've got enough points to get out on overseas time alone."

McIntosh: That was nice. Did your unit get several citations?

Geishirt: Oh, yeah.

McIntosh: I'll bet.

Geishirt: We got a couple of Presidential Citations, Distinguished Unit Badge. Well, we got two Presidential Citations. Then we got one also from the Navy through the Marine Corps that we assisted a fair amount (??). That one we got later on when we had one of our reunions down to Scott Field.

McIntosh: When you got out, you got out of the service from Fort Sheridan again?

Geishirt: Yeah.

McIntosh: When you got out did you use your GI Bill?

Geishirt: No, I got a job as an electrician.

McIntosh: Oh, I see. Where was that?

Geishirt: Waterloo [Wisconsin].

McIntosh: You lived there for several years?

Geishirt: Yeah, then I started working here in Madison.

McIntosh: Were you married at this time?

Geishirt: Well, I got married in '43 when I come back on a furlough. And I went right back overseas again, so then I got a divorce. See, 'cause she was running around.

McIntosh: You got a Dear John letter?

Geishirt: Yeah.

McIntosh: Oh, my!

Geishirt: So, "Will you pay half the divorce?" So I says, "Yeah." [laughs]

McIntosh: Well, that's kind of sad.

Geishirt: Well, it—

McIntosh: You shouldn't of gotten married in the first place, is that—

Geishirt: Right. It was a girl I was going together with in high school.

McIntosh: So after Waterloo then you stayed in that business for quite a while?

Geishirt: Yeah, then I come to Madison. Then I was here in Madison—forty-seven years I retired.

McIntosh: What did you do in Madison?

Geishirt: Electrician, down here at Endres's.

McIntosh: You got married again?

Geishirt: Yup.

McIntosh: That work better?

Geishirt: Yup, that one worked better [both laugh].

McIntosh: Do you have a family, Ken?

Geishirt: Well, she had one daughter. Her husband died, so I adopted the daughter, worked out good.

McIntosh: Oh, that's nice.

Geishirt: She's got a degree from the university. She married a guy that used to play football at the university. He's got a masters in soils and turfs.

McIntosh: Well, that's nice. Any grandchildren for you?

Geishirt: Oh, yeah. I've got five of them now.

McIntosh: How wonderful!

Geishirt: I think one of them is having problems. She's got some kind of disease. She lost all muscle control.

McIntosh: Oh, my! Oh, that's a shame.

Geishirt: They ain't got my genes so I ain't worried about it.

McIntosh: Right. Did you join any veterans organizations?

Geishirt: Well, I've been with VFW for years. I just couldn't see it—well, they tried to help you with this VFW bunch up town over there. All they do is give you a bunch of papers and fill it out and kept going. I couldn't get to first base, and finally they says, "You're on your own." So I says, "Nuts." I got

a paper where it's stating I'm back (??) for the residuals of rheumatic fever since 1945. I come back, and I had troubles with my wrists and everything—my hands—

McIntosh: Did they give you any disability?

Geishirt: Nope, zero percentage, so I said to hell with them. So I quit, and I had a good job and I was foreman on construction, electrical. I was getting' over base pay, had good insurance, I was with the union so I says—just kept going. But then I did work up at the VA hospital, and I got to know some of 'em up there, and this one girl, I went in there to get my hearing aid. She sent me a letter, "Your records are gone, that fire down in Illinois. So we ain't got no records." So that's how come I got so many pieces [both laugh]. In an old shoebox I found that, "service connection rheumatic." I had gone in for dengue and malaria.

McIntosh: You had them both?

Geishirt: Yeah.

McIntosh: Didn't you take your Atabrine pills?

Geishirt: Oh, God, Atabrine, quinine, we used to go into dispensary they had a big jar up there, reach in pull out one handful [laughs], reach in pull out another.

McIntosh: But you still got malaria?

Geishirt: Yeah, still got it.

McIntosh: Did you have any attacks of that after you got out of the service?

Geishirt: Oh, once in awhile if I drank a little bit too much I'd get sickish.

McIntosh: But no fever?

Geishirt: No, I don't get too much of that. So I've been fortunate, and they said, too, with rheumatic fever I ain't got no heart murmur.

McIntosh: That's wonderful. You're lucky.

Geishirt: My grandpa had a strong heart [laughs].

McIntosh: Well, very good. Thank you.

Geishirt: Yeah, there's all kinds of stuff in there. Well, if you ever get down and see that video on the 11th Bombardment Group that I turned in. It runs for an hour.

McIntosh: I'll look that up sometime.

Geishirt: Yeah, you look that up because that's got a lot of stuff in it. It's all air, though. I mean it's island after island. There ain't much right on the island.

McIntosh: Sure, I understand.

Geishirt: It's just video—all the different—

[End of Interview]