

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JOHN G. GERLACH
U.S. Army Air Corps, New Guinea, World War II
1995

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Gerlach, John G., (1928-). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (46 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (46 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Gerlach, a Shullsburg, Wis. native, discusses his World War II service in the Pacific as a member of the 62 Engineering Troop Company, 443rd Air Lift, and his return to civilian life in Wisconsin. Gerlach discusses basic training at Maxwell Air Force Base (Alabama), troop carrier command training at Camp Williams (Wisconsin), and later training with paratroopers in California. Stationed in New Guinea, he piloted a C-47 named the "Defenseless Virgin"; he describes supply drops, reaction of natives to airplanes, daily life, alcohol consumption, morale, and plane disappearances. Gerlach mentions his rotation to the United States, assignment to the Pentagon, use of the GI Bill, and feeling that the war prevented him from pursuing his desired baseball career.

Biographical Sketch

Gerlach (b. October 27, 1928-) served in the Army Air Corps 62nd Engineering Troop Company, 443rd Air Lift. He achieved the rank of Major, and was honorably discharged after flying 150 missions and being rotated back to the United States.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs staff, 1998.

Transcription edited by David S. DeHorse and Abigail Miller, 2002.

Interview Transcript

Mark: Okay. Today's date is the 17th of May 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. John Gerlach of Madison, a veteran of World War II. Good morning. Thanks for stopping in.

Gerlach: Thank you.

Mark: I appreciate your taking the time. I suppose we should start by having you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Gerlach: Well, I was born in Shullsburg, Wisconsin, which is down in Lafayette County. My dad and mother ran the hotel there for 65 or 70 years and I was born and raised in the hotel. I graduated from high school in 1934 and came to the University of Wisconsin on a baseball scholarship. And a scholarship at that time was getting a job--they gave you a job in a restaurant--and I worked at Lawrence's Restaurant.

Mark: Where was that?

Gerlach: That was on State Street at that time. For a year. And then I washed dishes in the Phi Kappa Alpha house for four years, which was on Mendota Court. I was--played baseball at the university, was captain of the baseball team in 1937 and 1938, and in 1938 I signed professional baseball contract with the Chicago White Sox. I played briefly with the Sox in '38 and '39. In '38 I played mostly at Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, '39 I played at Shreveport, Louisiana, 1940 I played at St. Paul, Minnesota in the American Association. In 1941 I was playing at Atlanta and I was going to, and this was long before, Pearl Harbor, I was going to be inducted into the infantry. They flew me up, the Atlanta ball club, to Darlington to see my draft board and I got a six weeks extension and I went back and I was approached by the Air Force recruiting officer in Atlanta and he said if I would enlist in the Air Corps that they would let me finish the season there. So these are the things that change your life. Which I did. About in October after the season was over I went into cadet training and at Montgomery, Alabama pre-flight and went to--I was in the Southeast Command, what they called the Southeast Command, and went to primary school at Jackson, Mississippi, and, of course, on December 7 the attack on Pearl Harbor, from then on I went to basic school and advanced school and then into troop carrier training.

Mark: Okay. I'm going to backtrack a little bit.

Gerlach: All right.

Mark: If you could tell me a little bit more about your introduction into the military. That was at Maxwell Air Force Base was it?

Gerlach: Maxwell Air Force Base.

Mark: You were an officer so I'm interested in the sort of basic military training that you did. I was in the Air Force forty years later and my basic training was a lot of screaming and yelling and four-letter words. I get the impression it was different for you.

Gerlach: Well, we went in, there was--before the--we went into pre-flight in which you got military training. You got all your shots. And at that time at Montgomery there was an RAF training outfit that had come there. They were sending the RAF and that was when the battle for Britain was going on. It was mostly indoctrination into military life and learning how to march and I think we had classes in meteorology and engines and weather. But from there we went into primary school and we were flying Fairchilds, open cockpit planes--

Mark: Now, these were fairly old planes.

Gerlach: Yeah. They were bi-planes, open cockpit, and did all kinds of acrobatics and stuff, and they were great for that. That was on a field outside of Jackson, Mississippi that was, I don't know, it had been stuck up. We had Quonset huts and the commander was a West Point graduate, I remember. But the training was flight training, it was classes in meteorology, and mechanics, and weather, and everything that was associated with it. After Pearl Harbor we didn't get out very much because there was a crunch on to get pilots out and get them wherever, great shortage of pilots. I ended up at advanced school in Columbus, Mississippi, which was the first class that graduated from there. That was 42E which would be 42 May. And the whole class was sent to troop carrier command because that was just being organized at that time. And that was organized at Camp Williams, Wisconsin up at Camp Douglas. And we got up there and they didn't even know we were coming. At that time it was just a little strip up there. We didn't have airplanes; they brought in planes from the airlines.

Mark: DC-3 or something?

Gerlach: DC-3s and they still had sleepers in them and we'd come down and fly down to Madison on weekends and half of the guys would be hangovers and we'd be going back you'd have the bunks were full of guys. But from there we went to Selford Field--

Mark: That's in Michigan?

Gerlach: In Michigan near Detroit. We kept getting more personnel. We started getting C-47s, which was a military adaptation of the DC-3. At that time we were split into two groups. One group went to England and the group I was in stayed in the United States for a while and we trained, worked with paratroopers at Fort Bragg and trained glider pilots at Venturville, California and Stuttgart, Arkansas. And in, I think in January, we got order to go, we'd go overseas and we didn't know where we were going. We staged out of Fort Wayne, Indiana. We flew non-stop to San Francisco, which was about the same hop as from San Francisco to Hawaii. We got issued summer clothes so we knew we were going someplace where it was going to be hot. And we eventually ended up New Guinea. The flight over was from San Francisco to Hawaii, which was at that time about 15 hours. And went from there to Christmas Island, and Tahiti, and Fiji, New Caledonia, and into Brisbane, Australia, then went north to Fort Moresby. At that time the battle for the Kakota Pass was just terminating and the Battle of Buna was going on.

Mark: And so how did that impact on you? Were you involved in that battle at all?

Gerlach: We were dropping, we dropped, we did some dropping of soldiers on the Kakota Pass.

Mark: Dropping of supplies?

Gerlach: Supplies, everything. Ammunition, clothes, food, and I would say basically in New Guinea that's what we did a lot of because there was no communication or roads or anything. There was also airfields in New Guinea, advance fighter bases, and B-25 groups that were totally supported by air. I mean, everything that went into those fields--gasoline, bombs, food, everything was taken in there by troop carrier. When there was landings made like at Hollandia, or Sadar, or Biak, as soon as there was anything capable of taking an airplane we were in there hauling in personnel.

Mark: And so you got into sort of the back woods of New Guinea fairly often I take it?

Gerlach: We didn't get into--most of New Guinea, most of the settled part of New Guinea--is along the coast lines. We did have occasion to get back up into places like Monhagen. Yeah, we got into a lot of--in New Guinea there was a lot of small airfields that had been there to serve gold mines and Australian administrators and that type of thing but I would say most of the settlement in New Guinea was along the coastline. But we did a lot of flying in mountains and jungles. I mean, there was a lot of that.

Mark: Yeah. I was going to ask you about your impressions of New Guinea. I'm sure it was a very different place than any place you'd been in the United States.

Gerlach: Oh, probably, I'd say the natives out of the interior were right out of the Stone Age.

INTERRUPTION

Mark: I'm sorry. We were talking about New Guinea and your impressions of it and the natives and that sort of thing.

Gerlach: Well, the natives were right out of the Stone Age. I mean they, it was interesting. We'd go into these; some of these airfields back up in the mountains. They would know some way or another that airplanes were coming in there and they would come and look at the airplanes. There'd be a chief and maybe they'd have ten women with him all carrying vegetables in their hairnets. They'd stand there and look at that damn airplane and I often wondered what the hell they were thinking.

Mark: I've seen a *National Geographic* story a couple of times where some tribe in the highlands of New Guinea will worship airplanes.

Gerlach: They were headhunters. They were still headhunters.

Mark: Were they awestruck or did they want to trade? I'm curious because it's interesting to me.

Gerlach: I think they were awestruck. Trying to figure out what the hell kept that airplane up in the air and stuff. They would trade like vegetables and stuff but they didn't have a hell of a lot to trade excepting they had beautiful, they'd have bows and arrows, and quivers, and spears, and there was a lot of art work on them, you know what I mean? Design. But what they wanted was razor blades, or pieces of broken glass, or things that they could use, you know. Money didn't mean shit to them. They could care less about money. The only thing they could do with that was maybe wipe their rear-end and they didn't do that much I don't think. It was a whole different--and, really, money was, you realize that money is just a means of exchange. We would get paid over there and you wouldn't know what the hell to do with your money except play poker or something like that but there was nothing to buy. We got most of the stuff like tobacco and candy we got free mostly, when it was available. We used to get a shot of booze for every combat mission we had.

Mark: One shot?

- Gerlach: One shot. I guess that's a hangover from the old British Navy or something, I don't know. But we were entitled to one shot. And a lot of the guys didn't drink. I drank so that made it real nice. I could pick up their booze.
- Mark: As for the natives, I'm sure it was different along the coasts, Fort Moresby or something like that.
- Gerlach: The natives there had been exposed to civilization and they were a different breed. The interior people were much stronger and healthier. All of the people along the coast had been exposed to malaria and they all had, most of them had enlarged spleens or something from that. They were, but these police boys that they recruited like as scouts and things, they were husky guys.
- Mark: They were natives?
- Gerlach: But they recruited them from up in the Australian stations up in the mountains and stuff.
- Mark: I see. Did you have many dealings with the Australians themselves?
- Gerlach: Oh, yeah. We worked with Australian infantry a lot. Supplied it and infantry.
- Mark: Did that go well?
- Gerlach: Yeah, we got along with them all right. They were glad to see us all the time because we--but they were amazing. I remember up at Sadar they were fighting in the mountains up there and we were supplying them, they'd be fighting and at tea time they'd brew their tea and they'd sit down and they didn't give a damn what else was going on. This, the outfit we worked with had been in North Africa, they had been in Singapore, I think they had been in Greece, and they had just had the hell kicked out of them all the way. And these guys, they looked like they were 45 years old, all of them. They had just been through hell. And they had been had and they were tough, they were tough.
- Mark: What about the Japanese? Did you have contact with them at all?
- Gerlach: The only contact I had with them was hauling back wounded prisoners. And the only prisoners that were taken were guys that were wounded so bad that they couldn't do anything with themselves or commit suicide or anything.
- Mark: Yeah. But you weren't in shooting distance or anything.
- Gerlach: Oh, they'd shoot at us. We would, all of our drop missions and stuff were done at tree-top level and we would pick up small arms fire occasionally in

our planes and we had planes intercepted by Japanese Zeros and things like that.

Mark: Did you take many casualties?

Gerlach: Our outfit took casualties. A lot of them just disappeared. They're still finding planes over there that went down. And then when we went from Biak to Palau into Tacloban in the Philippines there was a lot of over water flying and we had just got C-46s at that time and we had trouble with the operation of them. We lost planes then. And we lost planes in the Philippines. Weather, enemy action. We had planes intercepted right over their airfield at Nadzab. Zeros come over in the morning.

Mark: That was in the Philippines.

Gerlach: No, at Nadzab in New Guinea.

Mark: I though--

Gerlach: You got a New Guinea map here?

Mark: No, I can kind of draw it here. Here's the tail, it's kind of like that and split in half and that would be Buna.

Gerlach: Lea is right up here. That's where Amelia Earhart disappeared. Ramu River came right down and we dropped paratroopers right here when they took Lea and they cut them off. Then they put a big airfield here. And that's where Nadzab was. Goosap was up here, then Finch Haven was here, and Sadar, and Hollandia, and Biak was up in the neck here. We were flying from there into Palau and go back over. Moresby is here.

Mark: If I'm not mistaken, the Battle of Buna was one of the first times if not the first time that soldiers have been flown to the battlefield. Were you involved in that at all?

Gerlach: No.

Mark: You got there a little later.

Gerlach: No, I don't think they were flown to the battlefield. I don't think that's true. I think the first time in New Guinea, that I know of, that they were dropped was at Nadzab when we dropped paratroopers in there. Buna, no there was no, they were supplied by airdrop there but, and that might have been what you're thinking about. But there was no place to land between Moresby and Buna. It wasn't too far, really. It was just up over the mountains, over--

Mark: But there's no way to get there except by air, I take it.

Gerlach: Not if you went from Moresby. You could go by boat and come in on it.

Mark: I've just got one, I've got one more thing I want to cover before we move on from New Guinea. And this was very early in the war and I'm wondering if you would comment on how prepared you were for the conflict.

Gerlach: We weren't prepared at all. There was a good deal of hysteria after Pearl Harbor. At Jackson, Mississippi they had us walking guard there because they thought the Japs were going to--I don't know what they thought. They thought there was a fifth column or some goddamn thing, but we were walking guard there at night, armed. The only planes they had on the west coast were a few old B-18s. They took pilots right out of, graduated them and sent them out to the Philippines and they got shot down like flies over there. I remember seeing pictures at that time of drilling of soldiers with wooden guns and things like that.

Mark: When it came to your operations in New Guinea, did you notice any sort of preparation for problems? Things you weren't prepared to do.

Gerlach: The only thing, I could say this, that was a kind of a forgotten war.

Mark: Right.

Gerlach: I mean, we were--the food was terrible, we weren't getting airplanes. I remember the bombers would come back shot up to hell and gone from Rabaul and they'd go out the next day but we were operating on a shoestring really. And I think the Japs were operating on a shoestring, too. They just got over-extended. When we went in to, like Hollandia and stuff, you could see the equipment they had was, outside of their Zero which was far superior to anything we had, but they had old Ford trucks, you know from, god, they looked like they were from the '20s and stuff like that.

Mark: Now, as the war went on, did you find that our preparedness had gotten better? That the war effort got more efficient?

Gerlach: Oh, I think, I didn't notice a hell of a lot of difference for a long time. The food we got was terrible. I can say that we had bully beef three times a day.

Mark: Always. Throughout the war.

Gerlach: Always, always. We had it for breakfast, we had it, and then they'd fix sandwiches for us to take on our flights and they'd be bully beef sandwiches,

and we'd have bully beef sometimes at night. Of course, they tried to fix it every damn way they could. We did, our squadron, or my squadron, we rotated a leave ship to Australia every week and we worked out a deal with a provision place in Townzo to pick up two milk pails of milk and a side of beef every week, and this was after we had been over there awhile and got acclimated. That helped a hell of a lot. It meant a lot to the guys to get some milk.

Mark: What sort of accommodations did you have? Did you sleep in a tent?

Gerlach: Tents. We had tents, basically. Excepting at Nadzab, we were at Nadzab 8 or 9 months I guess, we built ourselves kind of a permanent thing. We had a cement floor and screened it in. We had, the parachutes we used to drop in were all different colors for identification and so forth and we had one of those draped for the ceiling. And we traded two bottles of booze for a gas refrigerator. Some sergeant down at the medics, I think he stole the refrigerator. We always brought back booze and beer from Australia on the plane.

Mark: I was going to ask what you did for fun in these camps. Sounds like you got a little bit of alcohol anyway.

Gerlach: Oh, yeah. We managed to do that. I built a ball diamond and we played--

Mark: I was going to ask, actually.

Gerlach: It was a ball diamond in our area and we had a volleyball court. Tried to put up a tennis court. This was at Nadzab where we were there for quite awhile. The only trouble with that we could get tennis rackets down in Australia, in Sydney. In two weeks they'd be all warped with the damn moisture. And everything was mold all the time. I mean it was--

Mark: So, how was morale? You're kind of stuck in the boondocks--

Gerlach: It was pretty good. I think it was pretty good. We were a pretty closely-knit outfit. We stayed that way, really. Had a reunion last year; guys that are still living got together. And we kept busy. If we weren't flying, we'd get a volleyball game going or something.

Mark: As the war progressed you had to move on. What was involved in taking this camp apart and moving it farther up the island or--

Gerlach: We just, that shack that we had, we just left that there. I think we left the icebox and the whole damn works there as far as I remember. I flew into Guadalcanal one time--this was after Guadalcanal had been taken--I would

stay overnight there in the officers' quarters. They had a pillow. God, I hadn't slept on a pillow for so damn long. I just took the damn pillow and took it so I had the luxury of a pillow then. But those are the things you appreciated, you know.

Mark: The little luxuries.

Gerlach: Yeah.

Mark: If you could describe your plane and its crew. For example, did you name the plane like the bombers?

Gerlach: I had a beautiful painting of a nude woman on my plane, which was well known throughout New Guinea. The name of it was the Defenseless Virgin 'cause we had no guns on it. And my co-pilot ended up being a first pilot eventually; he was an artist so he painted this on there. I've got a picture of her someplace. Done in beautiful colors. The guys, the infantry guys and stuff, they'd be down there taking pictures.

Mark: So, it's a C-47? I'm sorry; I can't remember the type of plane.

Gerlach: C-47. **[END OF SIDE A; TAPE 1]**

Mark: C-47.

Gerlach: Transport.

Mark: Yeah. And this is a crew of how many people.

Gerlach: We had a pilot, and a co-pilot, and a engineer, and a weather guy. Going over we had a navigator but I don't know what the hell ever happened to the navigators; we didn't use them after we got over there. It was all dead reckoning.

Mark: Everyone got along fairly well?

Gerlach: Yeah.

Mark: The officers and the enlisted people and people from different regions of the country?

Gerlach: Yeah. I don't remember too much--we had a good--I was executive officer and then I moved up to group, I was a liaison officer. I was, 69th Squadron, we had a good CO and everybody got along pretty good.

Mark: As the war progressed, it's getting kind of late--I'm not trying to rush you but I know you need to go.

[TAPE PAUSES]

Gerlach: Everybody got along pretty good.

Mark: As the war progressed, it's getting kind of late--I'm not trying to rush you but I know you need to go. As the progressed, how did your operations change if at all? For example, was operating in the Philippines different that in New Guinea?

Gerlach: Not too much, no. We were doing the same thing pretty much. Flying out of, and I came home just after we got into Clark Airfield so I didn't have too much going on as far as I was concerned in the Philippines.

Mark: Yeah, you came back in February of '45.

Gerlach: Yeah.

Mark: Why did you get out before the war ended?

Gerlach: Well, I didn't get out. I came back. Flight fatigue.

Mark: Was there a certain amount of--

Gerlach: Rotation.

Mark: There was a certain amount of missions you were supposed to fly.

Gerlach: Well, I think when they decided up a group of guys that just had it. I think I had 150 combat missions that I was credited with. A lot of them didn't amount to a hell of a lot but a lot of them did, too, you know. We were, most of our pilots, were awarded, all got the Air Medal. Most of them got the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Mark: But as you mentioned you weren't discharged, you were just rotated back.

Gerlach: Rotated back.

Mark: What did you do when you got back to the States?

Gerlach: I went to--I got married before I went overseas and my wife and I went down to Miami Beach to rest and rehabilitation. That was nothing but a big party down there. And then I got assigned to the Pentagon in Washington--Air

Transport Command which was different than troop carriers. They flew the same type but they were not a combat outfit. We were a combat outfit.

Mark: And what did you do at the Pentagon?

Gerlach: I'll be damned if I know what I did. Nothing.

Mark: So, a desk job?

Gerlach: Yeah. I can't even remember what the hell I was doing, really.

Mark: Do you remember how you felt about that? Was it as exciting--

Gerlach: I was just ready to get out. I was in Washington when Roosevelt died. I was there when Germany surrendered. I don't remember whether I got, I was trying to get discharged, I think it was after Japan surrendered. And I stayed in the reserves for 5 or 6 years and I finally got out.

Mark: Before Korea?

Gerlach: Yeah. Well, I had three kids by that time, or four kids, I don't know how many kids I had--and I figured it was time to get my ass out of there.

Mark: I've got some questions about the postwar era, briefly. First of all, in terms of veteran's benefits that were available to you, did you use the GI Bill?

Gerlach: Yeah, I did.

Mark: I notice you went back to school. Did you use the GI Bill?

Gerlach: I did. I had a year left in law school. In fact, I didn't have a year--I had 15 credits to get but it had been four-and-a-half years since I went to school and I figured, so I came back and went a year under the GI Bill.

Mark: Did that cover all your expenses? 'Cause you--

Gerlach: Well, I had saved some money. I had won money playing poker over in New Guinea and I put some away and my pay was pretty good. We got pay-and-a-half, you know, flight pay. And my wife had saved a lot of it. We got along fine.

Mark: So money wasn't really an issue?

Gerlach: No. And then I went to work for; I graduated law school in '46 I guess, '47, '46. And I went to work for the old Schubring, Ryan, Peterson and Sutherland law firm here and then another guy and I started our own office.

Mark: Did you have trouble finding work?

Gerlach: No. Because, I think in the graduating class, law school graduating class that year was 13 or something line that.

Mark: You came back earlier than a lot of veterans did.

Gerlach: Yeah, yeah. They were all veterans that were in there. Guys finishing up. They had no trouble. Everybody was begging for--there had been a hiatus in there--four, five, six years when nobody was graduating, really.

Mark: As far as the GI Bill, there were other parts of it as well. The home loan program, for example.

Gerlach: Yeah. And there was a veterans housing and estate. In fact the guy that I went in with, partners with, for a while was director of the veterans house, state veterans housing here.

Mark: Really?

Gerlach: Yeah.

Mark: Do you recall his name off hand?

Gerlach: Art Field. I don't know if that's still in, or whether the state still has it or not, but, yeah, it was active in getting guys loans. I bought my first house under the GI Bill. They were guaranteed loans, you know.

Mark: And this was in the late '40s at the time? I'm not trying to pry, I'm just trying to get a timeline here.

Gerlach: I think I bought that house, the first house I bought was about '51 or '52 or something like that. It was great. The GI Bill helped a hell of a lot of guys. In fact, I'm not a Democrat but I remember the Depression very well. I graduated from high school in '34. I came to school here, I got that meal job but I also got, I had an NERA job--I got \$15 a month--and that paid all my expenses. That would pay all your room. And there was a lot of kids that graduated from high school at that time that didn't have anything to do so they went to school that wouldn't have gone to school at all if they didn't get that help.

- Mark: Back with the veteran's issues, after the Vietnam War some of the readjustment problems some veterans had were in the newspapers and the media and all those sorts of things. Did you experience any sort of problems concerning getting settled back? Did you have dreams or feelings of the civilian population--
- Gerlach: Oh, I was a little--the only thing that bothered me--I had always planned on making baseball a career and that screwed that up. No, I didn't have any problems like that. I don't think, I think the mentality of that war was a hell of a lot different. I don't think anybody expected to have problems. We did have, I remember, a couple of enlisted men that just went off their rocker over there. But it was usually somebody had screwed their wife back home or somebody wrote to them and said your wife is running around. I remember going up to see a couple of our enlisted men in the hospital, had them chained, had them strapped down. I don't think that the World War II veteran looked forward to having problems. You know what I mean? I think it was a different mentality. I think maybe the Korean War guys are a little different than the Vietnam ones. I think drugs had quite a bit to do with that, you know. I don't know.
- Mark: I've got one last area I want to cover in the area of veteran's things and that's veteran's organizations and reunions and that sort of thing.
- Gerlach: I haven't belonged to anything.
- Mark: You've touched on this before.
- Gerlach: I haven't belonged to anything.
- Mark: You never joined the Legion. Is there a particular reason why or why not?
- Gerlach: I'm just not a joiner.
- Mark: I've had guys tell me that.
- Gerlach: I don't belong to the Knights of Columbus and I don't belong to any association. Not that I don't want to. I'm just not a joiner.
- Mark: I'm not either.
- Gerlach: Some guys like that. Some guys like to be--and usually the ones I've been in--I was in a couple--I was in Sertomah--usually it's the same guys that do all the damn work and everybody else sits on their ass and don't do anything.

Mark: But you did mention reunions and you've gotten together with some of the men you served with.

Gerlach: We have a 433rd Troop Carrier group which at that time was the biggest troop carrier group in the world and we hauled more damn stuff than anybody ever did. It's one of the few outfits that has continued down to the present time. It's now known as the 433rd Airlift Group and they're stationed in San Antonio and it's a reserve outfit and they fly C-5s, which is the biggest airplane in the world. They're immense.

Mark: I've seen them.

Gerlach: Have you ever seen them? Been near one?

Mark: Yeah. Actually, I was on base detail and picked up garbage underneath the wings. I mentioned I was in the Air Force. It's a monstrous airplane.

Gerlach: Yeah, it's a monster. Well, anyway, we had a reunion a couple, three years ago, at Orlando. We got the 433rd Airlift to fly over and spend, brought one of their planes over, and this crew which I think are 15 and the damn crew, they've got loaders and they got, they spent about three days with us and they had a great time. So they invited us to San Antone. That was last year. So that's where we went. And that's, I forget, they had 12, 14 of them on the base there. They took us out, gave us a ride in the thing, took us up in the cockpit, took the wives and everybody. They could load the whole damn group in there at one time. But that thing, it's got two decks in it and the upper deck is like a theater. It's got a kitchen and a--and the lower deck they can put six Greyhound buses in that thing.

Mark: I've seen it. I believe it.

Gerlach: Three this way and two this way. It costs \$40,000 to fill it with gasoline. It's the damndest thing I ever saw.

Mark: They're impressive.

Gerlach: Did you get inside of it?

Mark: No. I was just picking up garbage.

Gerlach: It's 20 feet less in length than a football field. It's, you just can't believe it. Anyway. Our outfit, which is a reserve outfit now, all the pilots and all the personnel are reserves. The pilots are mostly airline pilots, fly with the airlines.

Mark: You've exhausted my line of questioning.

Gerlach: Oh, good.

Mark: It's 19 minutes after. So I got you done with 10 minutes to spare. Is there anything you'd like to add before we finish up?

Gerlach: I had a guy come in right after you called me and said he wanted something done right now. So that's the way our business is. And I'm supposed to go to Reedsburg tomorrow and play golf and I've got a seminar on Friday.

Mark: Retirement can be very busy sometimes.

Gerlach: Yeah, playing golf. I have a hell of a time.

Mark: Well, thanks for coming in.

[End of Interview]